

Subverting and Supporting the Government of the Day

The limits of youth agency in Sierra Leone

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Acronyms

APC	All People's Party
CDC	Chieftaincy Development Committee
CDF	Community Defense Forces
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DACDF	Diamond Area Community Development Fund
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
IDM	illegal diamond mining
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust

Table of Contents

1 . Introduction	6
1.1 Research question	9
1.2 Defining the key concepts	9
1.3 Significance of research	12
1.4 Kono background	14
1.5 Case study	15
1.6 Research design	16
1.7 Unit of analysis	18
1.8 Positionality and my local guide and translator	18
1.9 Overview of the literature	20
1.10 Interviews	21
1.12 Observation	23
1.13 Materials collected from groups	24
1.14 Research ethics	25
1.9 Validity, generalizability and reliability	27
1.15 Outline	30
2. Conceptual and theoretical framework	32
2.2 Patrimonialism	32
2.2 Tactical and strategic agency	34
2.3 Integrating tactical and strategic agency with patrimonialism	35
2.4 Applying the framework	38
3. Background	40
3.1 Youth alienation and the war	40
3.2 Who fought, and why	42
3.3 The grievances of rural youth	44

3.4 Politics and exploitation in the Kono District	46
3.5 The employment challenge	49
3.6 Reforming local governance	50
3.7 Social change, and enhanced youth agency?	52
3.8 The significance of the 2008 Local Council Elections for Kono	58
4. Findings and analysis	62
4.1 The ‘attack’ on No.11	62
4.2 The youth, and their grievances	64
4.3 Deliberate law-breaking	71
4.4 Turning point	74
4.5 Explaining the turnaround - new promises	77
4.6 The VP’s impartial supporters	79
4.6.2 Understanding “the government of the day”	83
4.7 The practice of supporting the government of the day	84
4.8 Narratives of exploitation	89
4.9 The elusive benefit from politics	90
4.10 Summary and analysis	94
5. Conclusion	98
5.1 The limits of youth agency	98
5.2 Patrimonialism as a stabilizing system?	99
5.3 Implications	100
Bibliography	102
Annex 1 Maps	103
Annex 2 Request for recommendation	105
Annex 3 Pictures	106
Annex 4 Contact chart	107

1 . Introduction

On April 23rd 2008, near the town of Small Sefadu in the Kono District of Sierra Leone, hundreds of young people invaded a company-held alluvial mining site and proceeded to load the diamondiferous sand into buckets and onto trucks. They continued for five days as their numbers multiplied to more than a thousand, until overpowered by the police and military. Clashes broke out, and some youth turned back towards the city of Koidu, where the attack on the sand hill degenerated into general violence and vandalism which lasted for several days. What drove them to commit such a bold and defiant act and how should this event be interpreted?

Understanding the reasons why youth are mobilized into violence – whether during or “post” conflict – has been a central preoccupation of academic enquiry in recent research on Sierra Leone. This has been the trend since Paul Richards’ challenge to the popular perception of African youth, captured in Robert Kaplan’s *The Coming Anarchy*, as an undifferentiated and irrational mass driven by extreme demographic pressures into violence and other destructive behaviour. Ethnographic evidence shows that youth are rational actors and that they exercise agency in the choices they make, (See, for example, Richards 1996; Peters 2004; De Boeck & Honwana 2005). Furthermore, there is an acknowledgement that dichotomous labels of victim or perpetrator; instrument or agent do not reflect the complexity of youth agency, (Honwana 2005; Christensen *et.al* 2006).

Debates about the history and nature of youth culture in Sierra Leone link closely to debates about the causes of wars in post-Cold War Africa. One economic strand of argument, led by Collier, has promoted the explanatory potential of greed in resource-rich countries with weak governments, (Collier & Hoeffler 2004). The existence of a political economy of conflict, characterized by economic interests that are vested in perpetuating and institutionalizing the conflict, is not disputed; however, historical and anthropological approaches have found the “greed” argument reductionist and unable to explain why many of these wars, including the war in Sierra Leone, actually started, (Bøås & Dunn 2007). The grievances and aspirations, particularly of marginal youth, rooted in their historical context,

are increasingly seen to be at the heart of the complex causes of contemporary conflicts in Africa, (Kagwanja 2005; Bøås & Dunn 2007; Christiansen & Utas 2008). Such aspirations tend to be more about obtaining the sustainable livelihoods necessary to form and provide for their own families, than about greed for its own sake, (Richards 1996, 2005; Peters 2004). Grievances about the impossibility of attaining these aspirations are often directed at the power holders of society, namely state and corporate actors.

Marginalized youth often find themselves in the contradictory position of simultaneously feeling hostility towards and depending on these same powerful actors to improve their life chances, hedging their bets between postures of defiance and devotion to maximize their own benefits, (Christiansen & Utas 2008). One enduring link between vulnerable youth and armed conflict in African societies has been shown to be the patrimonial network - both through its failure to provide for growing numbers of youth, and through its militarization, (Abbink 2005, Vigh 2003). In an often repeated dynamic, 'big men' have been able to exploit the vulnerable position of youth to their own ends, whether by mobilizing them into armed militias (Vigh 2003), or by 'domesticating' war time violence to secure victories in games of political succession at the ballot box, (Rosen 2005; Christiansen & Utas 2008).

In Sierra Leone, recent research has suggested that this link may be breaking down through a combination of factors expedited by war, including the empowerment of youth who have survived the war, (Peters 2004, 31), and the decline of patronage (ICG 2008). Empowerment has been thought to be rooted in multiple experiences relating to the war, such as the experience of becoming a perpetrator, through which one can transcend positions of victimhood - whether of violence or marginalization pre-dating war, (Coulter 2006; Zack-Williams 2001, cited in Peters 2004, 31). In addition, the post-war period has been characterized by heightened levels of rights awareness and social activism among youth, driven by donor aid and peacebuilding interventions which have included skills training and civic education among their prime activities, (World Bank draft study, cited in ICG 2008, 22). The International Crisis Group, referring to research carried out by the World Bank, describes one of the features of the post-war era as the 'rise of associational life', particularly in urban areas, whereby youth increasingly rely on the peer networks accessed through trade associations and local development groups for a social safety net, rather than on patrons, (ICG 2008, 1). Ethnographic research has provided further evidence of the growing

independence of youth. Frithen and Richards have shown how militia solidarities and moral communities formed during the war have translated into entrepreneurial independence whereby youth intentionally seek to limit their dependence upon manipulative big men, (Richards & Fithen 2005). In their article *Mercenaries of Democracy*, Christensen and Utas reveal the motives and methods of former combatants who used the opportunities opened up by the 2007 General Election to advance their personal short and long term needs and aspirations, by cannily supporting and subverting the state, (Christensen & Utas 2008). Keen (2003) asserts that young people, particularly those “with greater experience of the world outside the chiefdom,” are less likely to submit to the authority of chiefs, (Keen 2003, 89). Sommers (2007) in a report on youth employment in West Africa, prefaces his recommendations for engaging with the informal sector with the imperative of understanding the needs of so-called ‘rebel youth’ who reject “pre-war social norms” of subjugation to the authority of elders, (Sommers/UNIDO 2007, 1).

While not seeking to deny the transformative impact of the conflict on youth and society more generally, this study seeks to challenge the assumption that youth agency has increased in relation to elites, and argues that it is important to balance this picture with one that recognizes its limitations.

This study looks at the connection between political events and youth experiences of the state that underlie the local tensions that persist in the Kono District of Sierra Leone. The story of the attack of April 23rd - 27th 2008, on the sand dump belonging to Kariba Kono Ltd., when juxtaposed with the involvement of community youth groups in the local election that followed on July 6th, provides a window onto the position of marginalized youth in relation to political patrons.

Applying Honwana’s conceptual dichotomy of tactical and strategic agency (2005), this study argues that, despite the evidence of eroding social norms of deference and reciprocity among youth in Sierra Leone, patrimonialism continues to shape, and to limit, their engagement in the public domain.

1.1 Research question

This study therefore asks the following question:

Why did youth who participated in the unlawful expropriation of sand from the No.11 site then express such strong support for the ruling All People's Congress (APC) party in the local elections which followed only two months later?

In order to analyze these events it addresses the following sub-questions:

- *What experiences led some young people to attack the No.11 sand dump?*
- *Why was there such strong support by young people for the APC party in the local elections?*
- *Is there a connection between these actions?*
- *What does the case reveal about prospects for a return to violence?*
- *And centrally, what does this case tell us about youth agency in post-war Sierra Leone?*

Understanding why youth pursued this particular, perplexing, course of action can perhaps provide a partial answer to a broader question, of whether the agency of youth has increased with the experiences of war and recovery.

1.2 Defining the key concepts

Whereas the UN General Assembly defines *youth* as falling within the age bracket of 15 to 24, (See UN Programme on Youth) Sierra Leone's Youth Policy (2003), taking account of the impact of war on disrupting this period of youth, stretches the upper limit of the category to 35 years. Importantly, it recognizes that there may be young people falling outside this age bracket "who are exposed to similar circumstances as that of the youths within the specified age category" and that the implementation of youth programmes ought therefore to be flexible in accommodating such young persons, (GoSL 2007). The policy also distinguishes between "youth organisations," which are set up and managed by individuals falling within the stated age bracket, and which support socio and economic development, and 'youth serving agencies,' which are run by adults with the objective of supporting youth, (GoSL 2007).

This study subscribes to the view that *youth* is not a biological or developmental phase, but a socially constructed and therefore context-specific concept. The term, as it has

been used in Africa, is imbued with connotations of political activism, as well as social immobility, (Christiansen *et.al* 2007).

Politically, the term has simultaneously evoked connotations of youth as agents of resistance and as instruments of oppression. The image of youth as rebellious and anti-establishment is linked to the formation of youth culture in the twentieth century Sierra Leone, during which Freetown experienced several large influxes of economic migrants from the hinterland. In time, the resulting stratification of society into an elite colonial class, a Krio-dominated professional class, and a marginalized underclass of labourers and school dropouts made youth independent of the adult authority to which they had traditionally been subordinate, (Rosen 2005, 65). Markers of youth culture at this time included the *odelay societies*, which adapted the initiation rites, practices and supernatural beliefs of traditional secret societies, and which were known for their holiday masked parades that often degenerated into violence. Significantly, the elements of secrecy and violence embedded in the tradition of these societies were used to remake culture from one which was subservient to authority to one which challenged it. Organizationally, this translated into a horizontal “hierarchy of peers,” (Rosen 2005, 69). These youth formed the backbone of the anti-colonial movement, under the leadership of I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, who mobilized urban working class youth under his Marxist trade union association, the West African Youth League. Rosen explains how the emasculation of the League by a threatened Krio elite not only stifled the development of post-colonial nationalism, but also sent the message that governance “was the exclusive province of the elite, and that the political mobilization of youth would be suppressed”, (Rosen 2005, 68). It was soon after, during the period of high stakes for control of the newly independent state, that political parties began to systematically recruit young people as thugs to intimidate their opponents, and state-sanctioned use of violence became institutionalized, (Rosen 2005, 76). The continued associations of *youth* with rebellion and violence in Sierra Leone have their roots in these early experiences.

Among ethnographers, there is an acknowledgement that dichotomous labels of victim or perpetrator and of agent or instrument, do not reflect the complexity of youth agency, (Honwana 2005). *Agency* is defined by Giddens as the capability, rather than the intention to act, (Giddens 1984, 6). This paper assumes that understanding this complexity is necessary

in order to apprehend the meaning of the actions taken by youth in the case under analysis. In practice, this means understanding the circumstances and choices that youth face.

In addition to political connotations, ‘youth’ is also associated with a social immobility that is rooted in economic marginalization. Economic barriers frequently block entry into the formal rites of passage of adulthood; impeding the ability to make independent decisions, to marry, and to adequately care for dependents. This status is summarized in the use of the term *marginalized youth*, and implies a class distinction between elite youth and those who remain youth or “man-children” and whose advancing years stretch the limits of the youth category, (Bøås 2007, 29; Sommers/UNIDO 2007,18). Without the ability to be self-sufficient or to adequately care for dependents, it is all too possible for young people to grow chronologically into adulthood, without ever getting any closer to the status and authority that adulthood confers. Vigh refers to youth as being a ‘social moratorium’, a state of dependence and constrained freedom which must be escaped. Youth is therefore not merely a state of being, but also a state of becoming, as youth seek to expand their horizons of possibility through *social navigation*, (Vigh 2007). The concept of social navigation therefore makes it possible to see the logic behind seemingly illogical choices of youth as they are placed in a context of survival and social becoming.

The counterpart to agency is structure, which both constrains and enables individual action, through social rules, (Giddens 1984). The theoretical anchor of this study is embedded in Giddens’ theory of Structuration (1984), and the assumption that (youth) agents interact with social forces to change and to reproduce social systems and realities, rather than presuming a primacy of either agent or structure. I interpret the meaning of the individual and collective actions of youth through the lens of patrimonialism, as a social system with which youth interact. Patrimonialism has been described as a feature of post-colonial African states, which, as transplanted from colonial models, have never been fully emancipated from society, and which, as a result, derive their legitimacy from redistribution, (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Defined by hierarchical relations of reciprocity between patrons and clients, patrimonialism creates opportunities and barriers that youth navigate towards social becoming. To the extent that youth constantly seek out ways of improving their social position, they may do so by playing by the rules this system, or by challenging them altogether.

Honwana's conceptual dichotomy of tactical and strategic agency (2005), explored in the next chapter, alerts us to this important distinction.

1.3 Significance of research

Chronic youth un- and underemployment, and the social stasis it leads to, is seen as being one of the major destabilizing factors that contribute to crime and could trigger re-mobilization and re-ignite conflict, not only in Sierra Leone but across West Africa, (UNOWA 2006). In Sierra Leone, an estimated 76 percent of the population falls under the age of 35;¹ in addition, one estimation by the UN Office for West Africa puts the number of young people lacking proper work over 50 percent, (2004 Census figures, cited in ICG 2008, 22; UNOWA 2006, 9). There is a broad recognition that youth employment and opportunities for meaningful participation in the political process are urgently required to remedy the alienation at the root of this instability, (UNGA S/2007/269; World Development Report 2007; ICG 2008).

McEvoy-Levy (2007) maintains that the period following a conflict is a crucial period which can either make or break peace:

In the longer term, a peace agreement's endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, their perceptions of what the peace process has achieved, and their tangible experiences of a better life, (McEvoy-Levy 2007, 7).

Given that the failure and abuses of patrimonialism is regarded as one of the causes of the crisis of youth that contributed to the outbreak of the war, (Richards 1996) one would expect that addressing the root causes of war would involve ensuring that youth have the means to free themselves from dependency on patronage. Support to youth, through dedicated programmes, institutions, and funds,² as well as the increasing practice of "main-

¹ ICG 2008 cites a draft World Bank report, "Improving opportunities for sustainable youth employment in Sierra Leone," from 28 June 2007, which estimates that 42 percent of the population is under the age of fifteen, and 34 percent falls between 15 and 35. Adding these figures, 76 percent are under 35.

² The National Youth Policy (2003) established strategic priorities (job creation, skills training, information and sensitisation, community development projects, presidential award for excellence, youth consultation and participation) as well as linkages with key ministries and international development partners for implementation. The framework for implementation, as well as for promoting youth participation and dialogue, envisaged a National Youth Advisory Council, which would bring together representatives from district and chiefdom levels. In the policy, the NYAC is mandated to support the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and to serve as the communication channel between government and all affiliated youth organisations. Youth programmes are intended to be implemented at the district level, through District Youth Councils, that are mandated to identify youth concerns, needs and opportunities, as well as programmes and projects, and to implement and monitor such projects, in collaboration with local organizations. However, the

streaming of youth” into labour, health and other areas of policy, are intended to empower youth by “creating a level playing field for youths to actualise their fullest potentials...” (National Youth Policy 2003). The current government has committed itself to the issue of “youth employment and empowerment,” which currently includes plans to review the Peacebuilding and Youth Basket Fund, a project on youth employment in the agricultural sector through the National Commission for Social Action which is being implemented, the creation of a National Youth Commission, and the review of the National Youth Policy, but no national youth employment strategy is in place, (SL Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework 2008). Whether these mechanism are reducing the dependence of youth on patrons, or whether patronage networks have merely adapted to new modalities is not clear, (ICG: 2008, 5). It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the formal framework through which individuals and youth groups are able to access state and donor support, and to feed-back into local and national policy processes. However, a challenge of such efforts is to accommodate the reality of the diversity of youth, in terms of their social backgrounds, their educational attainment, their capacities to organize and participate in dialogues, and so on. Treating youth as a homogenous cohort risks creating programmes that in practice advantage the elite and socially well-connected youth who tend to have more well developed capacities for engagement in formal systems. Sommers, recounting a visit to a rural youth training programme in Liberia in 2005, observes how marginalized “rebel youth” were not among the beneficiaries, (Sommers/UNIDO: 2007, 1). He adds that the bias towards rural and formal sector in youth employment generation programmes are not adapted to the realities that most youth inhabit, which in Sierra Leone has been that many of those who flee the constraint of social options at the hands of elders in rural areas and find their survival in the sprawling and unregulated informal sector of urban areas, (Sommers, UNIDO: 2007, 9). This paper agrees with the argument that effective programmes must be rooted in the social realities that youth (differentiated) inhabit, and aims to shed some light on the political dimensions of this reality among marginalised youth.

NYAC has not been constituted, and only some District Councils have been constituted, due to funding constraints. A new body, the Youth Commission, is being established under the APC government.

1.4 Kono background

The research was conducted in and around Koidu city. Located 225 miles East of Freetown, it is the main city of Kono District which shares a border with Guinea (Annex 1), and which is known for its diamonds and for having suffered the worst destruction during the war. Kono has a long history of economic migration, beginning from the initial mining boom of the 1930s, under colonial administration. Struggles to control the resources began during this period. Faultlines that divided settler and migrant rights to mining access originated during the colonial administration, with a power accorded to chiefs to determine strangers, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 21; Fanthorpe 2005). Subsequent post-colonial governments politicised both the chieftaincy and mining access. This stoked the grievances of an underclass of rural youth and illegal diamond miners who had neither rights nor privilege, and who were expelled en masse from the mining zones by a corrupted army that established its own foothold in the industry. With the outbreak of war, the Revolutionary Armed Front insurgency absorbed much of the young, socially disconnected rural population, including many of Kono's migrating miners, (Bøås & Hatløy; 2006, 19). Collusion of subsequent regimes with warring factions for political objectives and for enrichment, and between the army and the rebel insurgency on the ground prolonged the war, (Keen 2003, 81). By 1998 the RUF controlled diamond mining and smuggling in the region, (Bøås & Hatløy; 2006, 19). In the first post-war administration, the SLPP government policies aimed at increasing legal diamond trading. But these have not served to heal the rift between traditional elites and the underclass of mining and other rural youth, (de Koning 2008, 7).

Although migration has not returned to its pre-war levels, and alluvial mining is said to be drying up, young people continue to go to Kono seeking fortune through mining and related support activities, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 20). Kono's population reflects the ethnic and religious diversity of the country, though migrants from the northern (and largely agrarian) districts of Koinadugu and Bombali are predominant, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 37). A study by Bøås and Hatløy shows that though mining is seen to be a migrant activity, as many as half of those surveyed were found to be indigenous.

As a form of livelihood, alluvial mining is extremely strenuous labour, and while it pays relatively well compared to other jobs, for the many who are not members of mining

teams, it is an insecure income, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 67). Most (mainly young men) see their work as temporary and hold out the hope of doing “something else” later, be it education, other work, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 73).

For those looking to do something else, there are few viable alternatives in Koidu, Kono’s main city. Years of mining have brought little in terms of development to the region, and what little progress had been made was destroyed by the war. Eighty five percent of the houses were burned by the rebels wishing to control the diamond exploitation, and little reconstruction has taken place, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 20). Most of the houses in the central area remain roofless, some with only weathered tarpaulins that leak with the rain. The dusty, potholed roads are difficult to negotiate in anything other than a bike, electricity is available by generators, and only selected establishments have private running water. Kono has no institutions for tertiary education, and few can afford to complete their secondary education, let alone leave to further their education. Plans to develop the agricultural sector have a long way to go before they can offer the needed absorptive capacity for those seeking livelihood.

1.5 Case study

The selected methodology for this research project is the qualitative case study. According to Yin, the case study method of enquiry is justified where contemporary phenomena is being studied, where contextual conditions are believed to be highly relevant, and where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, (Yin 2003).

With the exception of background research, most of the questions raised in this study concerned recent and ongoing events, and answering them required on-site data collection. Preliminary research on the internet had uncovered online newspaper articles describing several recent incidents of unrest involving youth and mining company in Kono. I had also learned from a Koidu-based contact that high numbers of young people were running in the local elections in Kono. The anticipated connection between these events - increased youth agency - was worthy of study. In addition, the political configuration of power going into the local elections (a Kono native as VP who had not won a seat in the general elections) created a unique situation in the history of Kono that was worthy of study in its own right.

Due to limitations in research capacity and unavailability of ready and relevant data sources, there is no quantitative aspect to the study.

With the exception of several online newspaper articles, there was an almost complete lack of secondary data on either of these developments. Administrative records had been destroyed during the war, making it impossible to obtain certain types of information.³ As a result, I relied primarily on interviews and conversations. I triangulated these with participant observation and, where possible, with relevant documentation from youth groups, and contextualized this current information with the academic literature. My ability to navigate the research terrain, and my analysis of these events draws significantly on the body of scholarly research, as is explained below.

1.6 Research design

The purpose of a research design is to plan “what you are going to ask, whom you are going to ask, and why”, (Marshall & Rossman 1989, cited in Rubin & Rubin 1995, 42). Rather than setting a rigid agenda for data collection, the research design is a tool that enables systematic data collection in an unpredictable environment by clarifying an overarching motivation for collecting data, (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 42,43).

A flexible design makes it possible to correct wrong assumptions, and accommodate emerging themes. On the continuum between exploratory and confirmatory research designs, this study is situated closer to the exploratory end. Originally, I had expected that the events in Kono were evidence of a growing pattern of post-war youth empowerment, as indicated by increased participation in formal political processes (more young candidates running in local elections) and non-legal actions (land grabs, labour strikes against mining companies and official demands made to government), and had prepared interview guides for different groups of respondents based on this assumption. However, I gradually began to see this case as an example of the opposite proposition, highlighting, rather, the continued dependence of youth on patrons, (See Bøås 2007). When the evidence failed to adequately confirm the theory, the aim of the design shifted towards exploration and adapting theory in order to explain what was observed.

³ For instance, neither the City Council and District Statistics Office had a map of Koidu.

Setting the parameters of this case was difficult given the breadth of the events and actors involved. Initially, I had considered doing a cross-case comparison of youth attacks on mining companies in several different chiefdoms; however, arriving several weeks before the elections during a period of high activity, I decided that this was not realistic and that it was better to limit the data collection to the activities in and around Koidu and the No.11 site within Gbense Chiefdom, in order to better understand the complexities of the context and actors.

Huberman and Miles (1994) explain how data collection and analysis ought to be carried out in tandem, as iterative processes that work together to refine the conceptual framework and to guide data selection and avoid data overload (Huberman & Miles 1994, 55). Rubin and Rubin add that selecting what is important ought to be determined by what is important to respondents, (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 46). The timing of interviews, around the local elections, contributed to how responses were framed. When asked about No.11, many youth would then end up talking about the previous SLPP government. When asked about their political activities, youth groups often preferred to discuss their plans and aspirations for funding and employment. I used an open and continuous design which meant that questions were constantly reformulated, and key informants changed on the basis of new information obtained during the course of research, (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 42,43). While questions and topics changed with each respondent, these centred on a puzzle - that youth who had challenged patrons in the No.11 attack several months earlier were predominantly in support of APC and *the government of the day*. Having previously been interested in the apparent expansion of youth agency, I began to probe the depth of patrimonial loyalty.

Given the dearth of other sources of information, I relied principally on conversations and interviews, for cross-referencing information about events, and for analyzing narratives. I began by speaking with community youth groups and representatives, partly because they were very visible during the campaign period, and partly as a way to understanding the political youth context. Out of 111 documented group and individual discussions and interviews carried out in Freetown and Koidu, roughly 64 were with individual youths and youth-led groups (some of which I spoke with a number of times), of which 35 described some sort of political involvement in relation to the local or general elections, and of which 19 explained their support for the government in power or demonstrated a type of

shape shifting behaviour. Overall, only 14 interviews (individual and group) were with youth who participated in the attack on No.11, although all of these youth also discussed their support for the ruling party. Part of the reason for this number being rather low as a proportion to the overall number of conversations with young people was that many youth had not participated in the attack because they were busy working or feared breaking the law. In addition, spoke with some individuals on multiple occasions, thus inflating the total number of interviews. (In other words, 111 interviews does not mean 111 people, let alone 111 different people). I made no attempt to count numbers of youths I spoke with, or who were present during group discussions. (See Annex 4 for Contact Chart).

1.7 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the case, which has been conceptualized around the combined events of the attack on No.11 and the local election campaign. This is justified on the basis that the common link is the participation of marginalized and formally unemployed youth. Rather than starting with a pre-defined and observable phenomenon, the subject of analysis emerged by observing and listening to youth groups and individual youth who were involved in one or both of these events, and by contextualizing this information with historical background and analysis of the current political situation, obtained through academic and news sources, as well as through interviews with key informants.

1.8 Positionality and my local guide and translator

There were multiple risks with regard to positionality that I had to manage during the fieldwork, namely my status as a foreign white woman who wanted to talk politics. White foreigners are often seen to be representing the aid community, and bringing the promise of assistance. After interviews, where young people had given of their time and opened up about their suffering, it was common, and reasonable, for them to ask what I would do with this information and what power I had to help them. In addition, being an unaccompanied woman in the midst of a male-dominated youth environment generated another set of concerns, not least about personal safety, but also about the way that the interview process could be misinterpreted by both subjects and outside observers as interest of a more personal nature. This had the potential to bias the choice of un/willing respondents, and the in-

formation they provided. In Koidu, where historically and currently, most foreigners are linked to the mining industry, I also had to be aware of actions that could inadvertently project this type of association, and to balance these concerns with the need to obtain information from the mining company that was the subject of the No.11 attack. Last, and most importantly given the timing, was the politically sensitive nature of the topics of enquiry, and the need to make individuals and groups comfortable to talk with a relative degree of freedom. In the context of the elections, while some respondents were cautious and could easily become defensive with certain lines of questioning, others were more than happy to have an ear and a platform for their message. In this context, several saw their involvement in No.11 as taboo and attenuated their responses accordingly, while others were not in the least bit hesitant to discuss their involvement.

My initial approach for dealing with many of these issues was somewhat predetermined by my choice of interpreter and main point of contact for the city, a young and outspoken female journalist and activist. But working with Sia was one of the most important decisions I took, and provided an enriching way of getting to know life in the city through the eyes of a local young person who also struggled for her survival. I had been approached by her, through a trusted contact within UNDP who had met with youth activists in the area and who had given out my contact information at my request. Sia had then approached me by email, and I made the decision to work with her in advance, on the basis of her knowledge of the local political players and the initiative she had displayed in contacting me and in providing unsolicited and useful information. Sia's own position carried a mix of risks and benefits for my own positioning.

As a journalist, Sia had the contacts that enabled me to quickly establish who were the initial key informants and gave me access to information that a less engaged person would not have been able to provide. At the same time this presented the possibility that informants would feel threatened by the presence of a journalist. We had agreed to monitor the situation, and to alter the arrangement if necessary, but in the end there was no evidence of such tensions. Importantly, given the timing, Sia was also not a political campaigner, and kept her political preferences private.

Translation, mainly from Krio, was only necessary while interviewing some of the youth, but most of the informants I spoke with had reasonable English. I had maintained it

was important though, initially, to have Sia attend the interviews with me, and to allow her some freedom in asking questions. I did this because her questions and occasional reactions after the interviews often revealed new insights and useful background information. However, as time went on and my familiarity with people and the situation increased, I began to work independently, meeting with her periodically to discuss.

As a peer of the youth, and known to many in the central part of the city, Sia provided an invaluable validation of my presence without which I might never have been able to make such advances in the short four weeks that I spent in Koidu. In several cases, gaining acceptance by some of these youth, and particularly by the leaders of these youth groups opened the door to talking more freely with their members.

In addition to having Sia introduce me into the local setting, I negotiated my position in other ways. I aimed to be as transparent as possible about the purpose of research and the limits of its impact. I would explain, to informants and whoever asked, about my status as a student, and my interest in the youth and how they survive. During the election campaign, I discussed with candidates and youth leaders supporting both of the main contending political parties. My main mode of transport was by bike or on foot, which distinguished me from other commercial and development interests that travelled in marked vehicles, and made my activities highly visible.

1.9 Overview of literature

Any progress made in the current study is heavily indebted to the wealth of scholarly literature on youth, and on the youth culture in Sierra Leone, which formed my point of departure in research. The theoretical framework for this paper focuses on a selection of literature from the post-war era, in particular the body of ethnographic research exploring the extent of social transformation as a result of the war, and the position of youth as actors in present day Sierra Leone. My analysis draws heavily on the conceptual frameworks of Honwana (2005) and of Vigh (2003). In addition, my understanding of youth culture in Sierra Leone builds upon studies by Utas (2007), Christensen and Utas (2008), Bøås (2007), Bøås and Hatløy (2006), Richards and Fithen (2005), Richards (1996, 2005 a,b,c, 2006 a,b), Fanthorpe (2001, 2003), Peters (2004, 2005, 2006), Rosen (2005), Abdullah (2005), Rashid (2005), Coulter (2005), and King (2007). My understanding of patrimonial politics and their

interplay with natural resources of the Kono District were informed in particular by Keen (2003, 2005), Reno (2003), Jackson (2006), and de Koning (2008).

In addition to these sources, I consulted Sierra Leonean newspaper articles for current information on unrest in the Kono District. Newspapers in Sierra Leone tend to have strong political preferences which biases a great deal of reporting. Furthermore, my access to newspapers was difficult in Koidu, where the newspapers were delivered weekly. I tried to be conscious of perspectives when utilizing information, and for the most part, utilized these articles as a starting point for learning about events and individuals, and for searching out further information.

1.10 Interviews

Silverman (2003) explains two basic approaches to interviewing. The first is the realist approach, in which the focus is on establishing facts and checking the accuracy of responses with other methods. In contrast, the narrative approach, “abandons the attempt to treat respondent’s account as potentially ‘true’ pictures of ‘reality’ [and] opens up for analysis the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world”, (Silverman 2003, 343). I applied a combination of both approaches. Topical interviews were used to piece together some of the salient facts surrounding the attack on the No.11 attack and other story lines, (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 296). These interviews tended to be more structured, with a list of pre-set questions. I also pursued a narrative approach through more open ended interviews, where my main concern was to understand the emerging theme of *the government of the day* as a culturally available construct which youth groups employed and shaped to their own meaning, and to explore the contradictory feelings of youth in relation to politicians.

During the first few weeks I spent a great deal of time speaking to people about the elections and the political context in general, as well as observing the election activities and their meanings. This meant also speaking with youth groups and civil society organizations (CSOs), which played both formal and informal parts in campaigning and in activism for peaceful elections. Initially I made no distinction between the youth groups and CSOs, and talked to a breadth of actors in an attempt to narrow down a target group. What began to emerge was the notion of ‘political youths,’ referring to the youth populating certain com-

munity youth groups who were heavily involved in campaigning, from informants and registered CSOs. My interest in these groups was also sparked by one of the earliest interviews with the District Chairman of the APC Youth League, who explained that the Vice President had promised that jobs would come to Kono, and that the youth groups falling within the League would be the first to benefit.

Initially I held group interviews with several of these community youth groups, and then, increasingly individually with their members. Focusing on two of the groups in particular within the middle of Koidu City that do the street cleaning, the Central Youth and the Gunpoint Youth (named after their locations), I went to the burned out houses where these groups held their meetings, which were more frequent during the campaign period. I also held interviews with leaders from three other such groups. In hindsight I should have taken a more systematic and focused approach to studying these groups, with more participant observation, including of their lives outside of these meetings.

Meeting with groups in their official capacity influenced the type of responses and the dynamic of interviews. I had an interest not only in their development activities, but also in the less legitimate political activities they were said to pursue. However, I quickly learned that broaching these questions directly made groups defensive, and that a better route was asking whether they had been approached by politicians. Groups were far more comfortable discussing their aspirations, and hopes for employment and project support. They were also very open about their feelings of frustration and exploitation on behalf of politicians.

The ice was often broken during these group meetings, and in the days and weeks afterwards, individual members were often happy to meet privately. With individual interviews, I would often ask respondents if they would like to meet at a given public location in the downtown, and whenever possible, I would make a point of offering a drink to relax the atmosphere and in appreciation for their time. Occasionally I would meet with respondents after working hours, when they returned from the mines, in which case we would continue with interviews by flashlight.

In addition to meeting with youth groups and individual youths involved in campaigning and the No.11 attack, I met with other individuals and groups with alternative perspectives from the marginalized political youth that I focused on. Meeting with chieftdom elders, politicians and candidates, the Tankoro police, the District Magistrate, and represen-

tatives of Kariba Kono Ltd. helped to fill in gaps, and to establish story lines about No.11 and incidents of electoral violence. These additional interviews and conversations were also significant in establishing who exactly these political youth were. By speaking with registered CSOs with a youth and social justice focus, what became clear was a large discrepancy in leadership, management, planning, networking, and resource mobilization capacities, as well as the educational attainment (including professional development) of the leaders of these groups in comparison to the less formal community youth groups. In addition, brief conversations with young people sampled by convenience, normally while working (repairing tires in the central car park, trading in the market, working in shops, returning from mining sites, riding bikes) also helped to build this picture by explaining their reasons for non-involvement in campaign activities and in the attack on No.11 by way of their employment and therefore their reluctance to become involved in activities that were associated with lawbreaking.

I made the decision not to use a tape recorder for several reasons. Because the nature of the research was predominantly exploratory, and because I relied primarily on interviews as my source of information, the volume of interviews I foresaw was large. Given that I only had the period during my fieldwork to do any transcribing, there was a tradeoff between depth and covering more ground. Instead, I took thorough notes of conversations, quoting respondents as much as possible, which I would re-write while things were fresh in my mind. Secondly, a recorder was not useful for group conversations and would make distinguishing voices and what was said difficult. Note-taking was also potentially less threatening given the occasionally sensitive nature of what was being discussed, and would keep respondents more relaxed. The tradeoff was my own ability to listen attentively and ask questions while writing, but with practice I improved.

1.12 Observation

I mixed interviews with direct and participant observation. Being in Koidu during the campaign enabled me to witness some of the formal and informal election activities and phenomena, including political and peace rallies, the predominance of APC party branding throughout the city, the elections themselves, and the activity around group meeting places. With an interest in establishing the claims of several community youth groups disputing al-

legations that they were merely campaign groups, I continued to return to their meeting places after the elections and found them to be empty most of the time, regardless of time of day. The activity surrounding these meeting places dropped off significantly after the elections, with several exceptions.

Street cleaning activities, taking place the last Saturday of the month across the city, brought youth out onto the streets of their respective communities, to shovel out the refuse from ditches. These street cleaning groups normally set up barricades to slow the traffic, and encourage passers by to make a contribution, some more forcefully than others. Another time, I was making regular visits to the meeting place of one youth group after the elections, only to find at the end of the week, one evening where members descended on the place after nightfall to sell and smoke marijuana. Meeting groups in these circumstances often led to more natural conversations, while at the same time providing a better understanding of some of the ways they found to survive and socialize.

I conducted several site visits, including of the No.11 site, in order to understand the space where the attack had taken place, and the distances covered by youth who travelled to the sand and back into the city. I also visited an agricultural land reclamation site, a project by a youth CSOs, to get a sense of how their activities were organized in comparison to the community youth groups which aspired to similar and even larger scale projects.

1.13 Materials collected from groups

A recurring theme in conversations with youth groups was their expectation of jobs from the ruling government that would come with new APC local council representatives. Several community groups and one trade association mentioned the fact that they were developing project proposals as well as writing letters to influential elders and politicians in order to request jobs. Few groups had actually produced such letters, but I was able to obtain copies, addressed to various senior politicians and officials, from one group which request “employment facilities.” These copies corroborated the expectation of patron-client relations in the wake of the local elections, which had emerged in interviews, (Annex 2). Other materials obtained included the constitution of a youth group and a funding proposal.

1.14 Research ethics

This study employed a utilitarian approach to research ethics, which judges actions according to the specific benefits and costs they incur for the individuals involved and affected. According to this framework, the standards for ethical recruitment, fieldwork and reporting phases of research are informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality, respectively, (Huberman & Miles 1994, 290).

Ethical recruitment requires the informed and voluntary consent of research subjects. In qualitative studies, where the process and outcome of research may only be vaguely determined, it may not be possible for participants to be fully informed. (Huberman & Miles 1994, 291). It is therefore important to provide the option to withdraw from the study at any point, (Lunde 2006, 17). Although I had prepared written consent forms, explaining the purpose of my research, I only used them infrequently. Most of my youth respondents had low literacy, and there were many situations where written consent seemed too formalistic in any event. I prefaced formal interviews with a verbal explanation of my status as a university student, and the focus of my research, and the final output. Other times, where a casual conversation led to useful information, I would explain my purpose and ask for permission afterwards. Unfortunately I had not fully internalized the practical implications of being systematic in conducting ethical research, and although I had provided my contact details on the consent forms, at the beginning I was not so conscious of the need to be explicit in explaining to participants their right to withdraw from the study. In practice however, I assume they knew if they did not have my number, that they could easily contact Sia.

The tradeoff of being visible (e.g. holding interviews in public places) and transparent was that my interest in politics and No.11 became known, and, together with the proximity of the elections, would occasionally raise suspicions. The risk for my informants was that by speaking with me this could send a message that they were interested in politics, and that more politically vocal youths would be more likely to discuss.

Not all of my informants were equally vulnerable. In a context where APC support dominated, those with minority views who were not actively running for office were careful not to express those views in public. Predicting these situations was not possible, neither was it always possible to move to a private location without indicating views an informant might prefer to keep private. It was generally difficult obtaining privacy when talking to

youth members of organizations while they were on duty. The situation arose at several junctures that individuals either were asked by leaders to talk, or volunteered, but did not appear comfortable. I did not press these individuals about their views, unless it was clear that they wanted to express them, in which case we would pursue the conversation elsewhere or at another time.

Confidentiality in this study was of particular importance given the sensitive nature of some of the discussions. None of my respondents ever asked me to reference them anonymously, however, with some exceptions, I do not believe that any of them provided information they were not willing to share publicly or that was not already public knowledge. As a precaution, however, I have decided not to name any respondents.

Closely linked is the issue of identifiability, which is a concern for respondents holding official or informal leadership positions and individuals with prominent local reputations. Where this issue has arisen in presenting the data, my general approach has been to report only what is already public knowledge, and to source it if the source the data if this too is public knowledge. Several individuals in the study are identifiable, however their positions and roles within events were well known.

For example, despite the fact that most youth groups would strenuously dispute any labels of ‘being political’, my analysis draws out certain contradictions between their words and their actions. Some of these groups were, at the time, pursuing formal registration as CSOs, which would entitle them to apply for funding and bank accounts. These had to meet a criterion of political neutrality, (Ministry of Social Welfare [Interview 51]). Information to the contrary I feared could have implications for their chances of obtaining this formalized status. However, the fact that the Ministries of Social Welfare and of Youth and Sports have established processes for determining eligibility which include a probationary period where their activities are monitored, combined with the fact that most local individuals I spoke with had already formed opinions about the groups in question, has led me to decide to name these organizations. In addition, I state clearly that, regardless of the fact that it was not possible to determine definitively the extent to which groups actually were “political” or not, it was not my purpose to categorize groups in this manner, but simply to try to understand the meaning of such labels in context.

Many youth were happy to discuss their views and their involvement, and to be taken seriously about their challenges and aspirations. One of the most repeated questions respondents had for me was what would happen with all the information they were providing, in terms of its productive use in promoting their cause. Reciprocity in research is by some estimations more important than informed consent, (Wax, 1982, cited in Huberman & Miles 1994, 291). There was an inherent imbalance in those benefiting from this research. Individuals, most of whom had had their education disrupted, were helping me to obtain a degree. In return, I was giving them a chance to be heard, and maybe a drink they could not easily have gotten themselves. I made a point of managing expectations from the outset, explaining that any benefits this research might incur would be indirect and long term. This hardly seemed satisfactory, so I undertook to make an abbreviated version of the paper available, and if of sufficient quality, to write a short article for awareness-raising purposes.

1.9 Validity, generalisability and reliability

Qualitative research aims to understand how phenomena are understood by those being studied, rather than to impose categories of meaning on objects and events. Validity in qualitative research therefore refers not to the scientific rigour of research design or data collection processes that precedes statistical generalizations, but to the inferences that can be drawn from the accounts of individuals, groups, phenomena, etc., (Maxwell cited in Huberman & Miles 2002, 42). The qualitative researcher has a duty to demonstrate that objects and their local meanings are accurately apprehended in order to make plausible theoretical propositions and explanations.

Maxwell distinguishes several layers of validity which help in breaking down the potential threats to validity that can arise in the course of research. The first level is descriptive validity. This refers to the “factual accuracy of [an] account,” which can be directly observed, or inferred from other information sources, (Maxwell cited in Huberman & Miles 2002, 45). While I was able to directly observe some of the election activity and embedded discourse, I was not present at the time of the attack on No.11, and so was only able to infer events from interviews with participants and outside observers. Discrepancy between accounts, particularly statistically descriptive aspects, for instance the estimated numbers of youth involved, could not always be verified. However, achieving this level of accuracy did

not affect the ability to identify meaning or to draw inferences. Events that were repeated by different groups of youth and the company were taken to be significant, and shaped the composite story line, such as the promise by the vice president, and a provocative statement by an SLPP member, to name a few. Some of these facts were confirmed in newspaper articles. The “facts” being established were not always about events, but also about intangible beliefs and opinions, such as their grievances against the SLPP party, and the belief that political connections were necessary for social advancement. I tended to ask about these directly, and also to contextualize these statements with my own observations.

In addition to establishing factual accounts, I had to try to understand the meanings of different facts from the perspective of my informants, what Maxwell calls “interpretive validity”, (Maxwell cited in Huberman & Miles 2002, 48). A good example of a potential threat to validity was the significance of No.11 to the youth involved in the attack. When I realized that I had assumed that most youth were aware of the illegality of their actions, I added new questions and was able to establish a more nuanced account, involving different levels of awareness. For the local leaders, the attack was political exactly because of the restrictions to their access, while others also politically, asserted emphatically that the sand belonged to the youth. Still others, I had been told, had come from further afield, under the misapprehension that the sand had now been given to the youth. Similarly, the significance of the phrase the government of the day, emerged not only from the words and actions of youth groups around the local elections, but also from speaking with several chiefs and through background reading on the chieftaincy system which indicated a pre-existing conceptual framework that youth groups were building upon.

As Silverman states, the overriding concern is understanding how groups depict reality through narratives, rather than establishing accuracy, (Silverman 2003, 348). Part of my task was squaring narratives of exploitation of youth by politicians with the ample evidence that most of these same youth were strong supporters of the current government. I organised the material with categories created by participants. Themes emerged of support and subversion that were in evidence in the discourse and in the actions taken and described by youth. Some such as the *government of the day* emerged directly from the words used by the youth, and resonated more broadly with their actions of support, while others were more de-

scriptive of general attitudes and opinions. Though some interviews were more topical and others narrative, in practice, accounts of fact and meaning were often blended.

In addition to attempting to comprehend the situation of my youth informants from their perspective, I also applied an exogenous theoretical construction to explain the perspectives of the youth. In particular, what this theory helped to explain was the incongruence in the past and present behaviours and (present) discourse of youth. According to Maxwell:

... theoretical validity... depends on whether there is consensus within the community concerned with the research about the terms used to characterize the phenomena,” (Maxwell cited in Huberman & Miles 2002, 52).

While at no point did informants employ the terminology of “patron” or “client” or “agency”, many youth described their personal and group situations in terms of opportunities and constraints which connected to political factors. This tended to be framed in terms of exclusion (when discussing the previous SLPP regime) and hope for inclusion (when discussing the APC party). The combination of both Honwana’s conceptual dichotomy of strategic and tactical agency, and Vigh’s social navigation held explanatory value for the actions of youth, while the concept of patrimonialism helped to enlighten the networking pathways that were opened up at election time, as well as the patterns of exclusion which they had described.

The findings of single case studies can be generalized, not to wider universes on the basis of representative sampling, but analytically, based on the relevance of a theory to similar populations or situations, (Yin 1994, 36; Maxwell cited in Huberman & Miles 2002, 53). I argue that the finding that patrimonialism continues to shape and to limit the political engagement of marginalized youth applies beyond those youth I saw in Kono, to the many youth with the same lack of livelihood, educational and other opportunities for social advancement. Yin adds that generalization is “not automatic” and must be “tested through replication,” (Yin 1994, 36). The current proposition builds on other research that has established the persistence of patrimonial dynamics in mobilising youth during the 2007 General Election (e.g. Christensen & Utas 2008). However, further testing is required to see whether the claim that patrimonial imperatives limit the agency of youth, holds explanatory value in other situations.

Finally, I have attempted to maximize the transparency and replicability of this study with comprehensive documenting of conversations, careful notation within transcripts of assumed meanings and researcher's notes (indicated with double brackets [[..]]), a field notebook illustrating the evolution of categories, and a log of conversations including dates, location, how the informant was accessed, and key themes. Allowing for the fact that the present colours how one speaks of the past, a researcher who wanted to retrace the steps of this study would likely find at least the same factual accounts, and the same range of meaning accorded to those facts, and while other inferences might also be drawn, those made in the present study would be found to be reasonable, on the basis of the analysis that follows.

1.15 Outline

The next chapter sets out the conceptual and theoretical framework on youth agency and patrimonialism that is applied in analyzing the findings. Chapter three gives historical background on the grievances held by youth leading to the war, the history of mineral exploitation and political interference in Kono District. It also looks at the situation of youth since the end of the war, including relevant governance reforms, and explores the question of whether their agency has been enhanced. It finally explains the significance of the 2008 Local Council Election in Kono. Chapter four presents and then analyses the story of the No.11 attack and the subsequent actions and discourse of youth which followed several months later during the local election. Chapter six concludes and explores implications and future areas of research.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

When they realized the government had broken its promise to them of distributing the sand, after the opposition party MP had said as much on the radio, the leaders among them decided to claim their rights and to force the accountability of the party in one bold act. Hundreds came, and their numbers multiplied, some estimated up to more than a thousand. They trespassed onto the No.11 site and began to take the sand, carrying it away where they could wash it for diamonds. Lest their message be misinterpreted, one of them carried a red flag and planted it at the top of the towering dune, as testimony of their rightful claim. The order had soon been sent for some of the local chiefs to meet with the company and to try to negotiate. For a few brief days, they seemed to be winning. But behind closed doors, the party was realizing there was no room for compromise with the company that legally owned the rights to reprocessing the tailings. Several days after they had begun the strike, the police and army arrived.

At first glance, the present case could be read as an empowered group of youths who are breaking with traditional norms of subservience to authority, and, to some extent, this may be the case. But taken within its political setting, this conclusion does not fit. Two months later, these same youth who had been among those to consciously break the law and to risk angering both the government and the company, had become the most loyal supporters of the APC party, and of Vice President Sam Sumana in particular, as evidenced by their discourse on *the government of the day*. Taken together, I argue that these seemingly contradictory behaviours represent the limits of youth agency in the face of enduring patrimonial power. The theoretical framework that is put forward in this chapter, by making the link between individual agency and patrimonial social structures, helps to clarify this argument.

2.2 Patrimonialism

Patron-client relations are by definition unequal. Bangura defines patrimonialism as:

A system of resource distribution that ties recipients or clients to the strategic goals of benefactors or patrons. In the distribution of 'patrimony', or public resources, both patrons and clients attach more im-

portance to personal loyalties than to the bureaucratic rules that should otherwise govern the allocation of such resources, (Bangura 1997, 130 cited in Vigh 2007).

Within government, this translates into a blurring of public and private spheres. In neopatrimonial regimes, norms of “bureaucratic rationality,” which are defined by impersonal and rules-based management of public goods, coexist alongside patrimonial norms and informal practices that personalize the redistribution of public resources, (Bøås & Dunn 2008, 22). Politics is informalised and acted out through vertically linked patron-client exchange-based relations, and legitimacy of the state is closely tied to redistribution, (Chabal & Daloz 1999).

On the client side, patrimonial networks can both privilege and marginalize. Many youth find it impossible to advance socially without the direct or indirect assistance of such contacts. The benefits of being connected to a well-positioned patron can include anything from basic sustenance, to jobs, education, political influence and the ability to sustain one’s own patronage network. In the Kono District, the connection between youth, local patrons and ones within the central government is linked to the power these patrons hold over the distribution of mining licenses, land, jobs within the kimberlite (deep rock) mining industry, and other resources which constitute the essential elements for livelihood and social mobility, (Reno 2003). Ultimately, when income-generating opportunities are acutely limited, as they are for poor youth in Sierra Leone, attachment to a patron may be the only viable way of improving one’s social prospects (most other means only providing basic survival).

The benefits of patrimonialism are exclusive. Youth who cannot manage to advance themselves within existing networks, or who are shed off of contracting networks, must turn to outside options to survive and to have a chance to become somebody in society. This may increasingly be through peer associations, but often also involves seeking new patrons, whenever the opportunity arises. There are several times when broader networks absorb new youth. In what Vigh refers to as the militarization of patrimonial politics, in times of conflict, previously marginalized youth form a willing pool of recruits for warlords, serving military objectives in exchange for patronage and the chance to realize dreams of social becoming, (Vigh 2007). Similarly, elections, as times of political uncertainty and jockeying for power, open up recruitment avenues for young people who seek benefits by supporting

politicians, (Utas 2007). As a result, patrimonial allegiance is frequently the *modus operandi* of political engagement of marginalized youth who seek to be on the inside of such networks.

2.2 *Tactical and strategic agency*

A useful framework for understanding the power of marginalized youth in relation to political patrons has been developed by Alcinda Honwana. She applies dual concepts of tactical and strategic agency to understanding how child soldiers, as actors who are frequently forced into dangerous roles, and who have little or no choice in their actions, find ways to exercise power from a “position of weakness”, (Honwana 2005, 49). On the battlefield, a child soldier must continuously negotiate his survival, seizing opportunities as they present themselves. The child combatant may still exercise agency from this position by tactically manipulating rules and structures as opportunities arise, for example, feigning ignorance, “pretending to be ill”, or “planning an escape”, (Honwana 2005, 48). This “tactical agency”, she quotes, is *‘the art of the weak’*, (de Certeau, cited in Honwana 2005, 48,49) in the sense that these actors operate within a terrain that is characterized by a high degree of insecurity, in which their space to manoeuvre is limited. The battlefield example suggests myopic vision, looking only as far as the next position of relative security, whereby the agent may not be aware of the longer term consequences of his/her actions, let alone able to select and connect these actions to achieve ultimate goals.

Strategic agency, in contrast, involves partly the capability to set longer-term goals and to take calculated actions that will lead to their eventual achievement. Strategy, in its military sense, she explains, involves:

the calculation or manipulation of relationships or force that becomes possible as soon as a subject of will and power, such as an army, can be isolated from an environment. A strategy ‘assumes a place that can be circumscribed as “proper” (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries), (Certeau, cited in Honwana 2005, 49).

This space which the agent creates is isolated from the threat of immediate physical incursion, and provides the room to strategize - to evaluate risks, and plan a course of action to reach a given goal. Actions taken on this basis are carefully thought through, with the agent

exercising greater control. This isolated and adequately-resourced space, or '*proper*', which forms the power base of strategic agency, is absent in tactical agency.

Vigh (2003), also drawing on de Certeau (1984), clarifies an important dimension in the relationship between tactical and strategic agency, in his development of the concept of social navigation. Strategic agency indicates one's ability to demarcate this space, or terrain, for the purpose of attaining a given military or political object, for instance. In contrast, tactical agency draws upon the "symbolic, cultural or economic resources" at one's disposal to navigate an unstable terrain that is constituted by others, in order to enhance one's position and "strategic possibilities," (Vigh 2003, 137). While the resources empowering them differ, both agencies involve enhancing one's position. Neither form indicates a permanently weak or powerful position. Rather, agents move dynamically between degrees of agency as they shift between domains. While an agent may assert his authority in a private domain he has constituted, he may lack this power in the public domain, seeking it through continuous identification and exploitation of opportunities, (Vigh 2003 140-141). In other words, the process of "social becoming" and the empowerment this brings can be thought of as the navigation from a position of limited and dependent *tactical* agency to one of self-contained *strategic* agency.

Determining whether youth discourse and actions exhibit tactical or strategic is considered central in monitoring and assessing the extent to which their agency is increasing, and whether or not they are becoming "empowered".

2.3 Integrating tactical and strategic agency with patrimonialism

Given the salience of patrimonial structures in both marginalizing and creating opportunities for youth, their relationship to youth agency and empowerment warrants further reflection. Drawing on work done by Vigh (2003), this paper integrates Honwana's conceptual dichotomy with patrimonialism as a system in order to help to analyze not only the extent of youth aspirations, but also the degree to which youth act with reference to patronage as a source of objective constraints and opportunities. In so doing, it can help to clarify the circumstances of genuine empowerment, and to identify instances where, perhaps despite appearances to the contrary, youth agency remains constrained by dependency upon patrons.

As the above definition of patrimonialism by Bangura indicates, the client is tied to the strategic goals of the patron. Relations between patron and client are therefore, by definition, ones of superior and subordinate. In Honwana's terms, the position of the patron is essentially strategic, while that of the client is essentially tactical. The social contract between client and patron is one of asymmetric reciprocity. Clients find themselves within a position of dependency on the patron much more than the reverse is true. Patrons set the principal objectives and rules of engagement, and as a result, they exercise a degree of control over the actions of the client that is not reciprocated. Although clients do possess resources that allow them to exercise some influence on the realization of the strategic objectives of patrons, this is normally done within the framework of rules that favour the patron.

Take the example of an election. The victory of politicians (patrons) in an election relies on the capacity of youth (clients), collectively, to mobilize voters. Similarly, clients may depend upon patrons for benefits, whether short term personal gains such as one-off payments or jobs, or longer term collective rewards, such as better roads and educational opportunities. Just as patrons will court the vote of their supporters during a campaign, clients may seek to demonstrate their loyalty and usefulness. One also expects that they will act with a view to preserving the relationship, or at least avoiding measures that might jeopardize it, for as long as they depend on patrons for these benefits.

Following a victory, there is no expectation from clients of an equal division of benefits, though the situation on both sides is expected to improve, even if only in the long term. Benefits accruing to clients are secondary, in sequence, after the strategic objective of electoral victory for the patron. While clients play a crucial role in the attainment of this victory, they have little direct control over the realization of promised material and social benefits once the election is over, and therefore depend on the good faith of patrons to fulfill their side of the contract. An important distinction between positions is that, although the patron cannot engineer a victory without his/her troops, he/she normally ceases to require the support of clients after being voted into office. Therefore while there is still an obligation towards clients, the client has no leverage over this secondary objective, outside of other existing mechanisms for holding the patron accountable. The client is essentially in a tactical position, by virtue of the need to adjust expectations and to direct behaviours/actions toward

attaining the strategic objective of the patron, while being in a position of prolonged dependency on the patron for the fulfillment of electoral promises.

Despite their predominantly tactical position of during elections, youth continue to exercise their agency in opportunistic and manipulative ways, by undermining rules and norms. Vigh (2003) observes, in a patrimonial context, youth are conscious of both “the immediate and the imagined” as they navigate “networks and events”. They are highly aware of current opportunities and constraints, while building contingencies into their plans for shifting configurations of power, (Vigh 2003, 142). The practice of *watermelon politics* in the 2007 General Election, where many youth broke social norms of reciprocity by accepting benefits from one party, but voting for another, reveals an agency that is quintessentially tactical in its shrewd manipulation of political circumstances to extract benefits.

Youth, by the social moratorium that defines their position, aspire to strategic agency. Although it is less feasible for them to exercise it within society, than within aspects of their personal lives and relationships which they can control, but it is not impossible. Strategic agency normally characterizes the position of patron, but it can also be established outside of the patrimonial terrain. It can manifest itself as the socio-economic independence that insulates clients from reliance on patronage, and therefore from the power relations entailed. In this instance, the *proper* is anchored in resources that provide alternative means of achieving goals, such as direct access to donor funding for projects, or a livelihood. Alternatively, strategic agency might manifest itself as the ability to shape the societal space within which patrons operate, and thereby to influence their choices and actions. For example, formal processes that protect and promote the right of youth constituencies to equal participation in societal decision-making, or effective accountability mechanisms that youth can inform, can increase their leverage after elections. In the absence of such channels, youth may also exercise strategic agency by utilising their resources, such as collective action or the threat of violence, to reverse the normal balance of power between patron and client, and thereby to influence or even compel certain outcomes. Such actions, which risk damaging relationships with patrons, highlight the gulf between this level of independence, and the tactical agent who seeks, at a minimum, to preserve his relation with the patron. An example of this type of strategic agency is the practice of “watermelon tricks” in the 2007 General Election, whereby ex-combatants on the “politician patrol” attempted to redefine their rela-

tions with patrons, by coercing them to act in line with their own objectives. They did this by utilising the symbolic value of their feared image to intimidate and extort money from political big men, (Christensen & Utas 2008). The potential to backfire means that such actions would not be taken under circumstances of strict dependency upon patrons.

Patron client relations are complex, in that an agent may be both a patron and a recipient of patronage (a client) at the same time. As a patron, he/she may exercise strategic agency over the labour market that his/her patronage creates, by marshaling supporters to achieve his/her political goals. At the same time, he is dependent upon the continuous flow of patronage that empowers him/her to maintain such a network. Access to patronage for redistribution is therefore a significant resource that underpins the strategic agency to shape the political terrain.

Given the lack of effective formal channels for marginalized youth to influence decisions and actors in the public sphere, strategic agency can either be established through co-optation into the patrimonial system (new patrons are made), or outside the system, through disengagement due to socio-economic independence, or by challenging existing power relationships and resource (re)distribution.

2.4 Applying the framework

Having a framework for determining, broadly, types (or levels) of youth agency might make it possible to monitor change in the agency of differentiated youth groups over time. It could also provide a basis for operationalising vague notions of youth empowerment which constitute an objective of many youth policies and programmes.

The framework is applied by analyzing specific events, acts and patterns of behaviour of youth in the public sphere, rather than for categorizing groups of individuals, whose agencies are context-specific and dynamic. It begins by asking one overarching question:

Do youth exercise their agency in a tactical or strategic manner?

Answering this question requires understanding what motivates certain actions, and the patrimonial context within which they are executed.

Where youth are socially and economically marginalised, there tends to be a discourse of exploitation, injustice and entitlement. This is often directed, to a lesser or greater extent, towards figureheads of the establishment that oppresses them, such as politicians,

authority figures and corporate actors. In such a context, one indicator of strategic agency might include subversive or vigilante action, taken to redress rights and claim entitlements, which risks damaging relations with patrons. Alternatively, it may be reflected in less confrontational ways, such as the ability to influence societal decisions on equal footing with non-youth politicians, elders and authority figures, or the ability to carve out and grow socio-economic spaces that are protected from patrimonial interference. In general, strategic actions that are not embedded within patrimonialism should be characterized by behavioural and rhetorical consistency that reveals commitment to social justice as a principle of governance, rather than as a particularist outcome.

Given the assumption that the agency that clients exercise in relation to patrons is inherently tactical, an indicator of tactical agency is the pervasive belief, among youth, that favourable positioning vis-a-vis patrons is needed for social advancement. This may be expressed by actions and discourse that are highly supportive of patrons, and may be reinforced by evidence that such support is undermined by mistrust, or driven by a lack of alternatives. Either of these features may reveal a position of reluctant dependency.

Based on this understanding, certain sub-questions have been devised to guide the case analysis, and to identify the type of agency revealed in the case:

- Was the action initiated and led by youth or by patrons?
- Were actions and behaviours intended to strengthen relations with patrons, or did they risk damaging them?
- What likelihood is there of aspirations attached to this action/behaviour being fulfilled?
- Do youth exhibit consistency with their support or opposition to patrons?
- If not, how is inconsistency explained?
- To what extent have power relationships in the public domain been altered by events?

3. Background

To understand the current narratives of exploitation and aspiration of youth, it is necessary to appreciate how they are anchored in a longer history of exclusion and exploitation. This chapter does not attempt to replicate histories of state making, war and settlement, but discusses aspects of these processes that have impacted on youth grievances and agency over the years. Section one begins how the grievances of youth contributed to the war, followed by a description of the fighters and their motivations. The subject of rural grievances, and the historic linkages to governance processes and their exclusionary impact on rural youth in particular is considered in greater detail in section three. Section four focuses on Kono, and the historic relation between mining, governance and the mobilisation of young “strangers” in the district. Sections five and six consider the post-war youth employment challenge, and several local governance reforms that impact on the grievances of youth. Section seven explores several studies of youth behaviour and organization since the end of the war and considers how the social change brought by war and recovery has impacted youth agencies. The last section provides the political background for understanding the significance of the 2008 local elections in Kono.

3.1 Youth alienation and the war

At the core of the civil war was the breakdown of the state, from its kleptocratic centre, to its unaccountable peripheries. State failure was accelerated by economic factors: the global and domestic economic crisis of the 1970s, the distortions of neoliberal policies imposed by international financiers, and the drying up of aid with the end of the Cold War. The neopatrimonial state became increasingly expensive to run. Although youth were not the only group impacted, the conditions produced within the domestic political climate and economy had particular implications for them. The conditions alienated young people by damaging their educational, employment, and social prospects. The opposition that arose in these circumstances was informal, and rooted in a university and dropout urban class.

The grievances at the heart of the war, Keen argues,

[...] reflect the mode of development in Sierra Leone, which under British rule was based on the extraction of unprocessed raw materials such as iron, diamonds, and a variety of agricultural products, (Keen 2003, 69).

The emphasis on extractive-oriented resource generation, at the expense of local development and economic stimulation, continued after independence in 1961, as politicians adopted patronage-based strategies of rule. These strategies prepared the way for predatory resource exploitation and violent conflict, (Reno 2003).

With the discovery of diamonds in 1930, the economy became geared towards mineral extraction, with diamonds as the primary export. Mining trade unionism emerged as a new force in provincial politics, and Siaka Stevens, a trade union leader with an Oxford education from the trade union college, headed the newly formed APC party. He was elected in 1967 on a socialist ticket, defeating its mother Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), itself dominated by conservative provincial elite from the predominantly Mende South-East region. The new party evoked the socialist tradition of Wallace Johnson's Youth League, and attracted support from youth in more remote and predominantly Temne northern districts (Richards 1996, 40). But this egalitarian ideology was superficial. Stevens consolidated and personalized his grip on power by intimidating and co-opting opponents, by gagging the press, and by buying off senior members of the civil service, the army and the police, (Keen 2003,1). By the 1977 elections when SLPP chose not to run, the country had become a *de facto* one party state, and by 1978, a one party state was declared (Abdullah 2004, 43). Stevens treated the country's natural resource revenue as a source of personal wealth, colluding with private sector mining interests to undervalue exports and share rents. High level corruption trickled down to the administrative level as loss of revenue affected the ability to fund public sector employment, leading bureaucrats and other public sector workers to compensate by other means for their lack of salaries, further weakening the capacity of the state to harness resources and to suppress illegal economic activity. Smuggling became endemic, and by the late 1980s it was estimated that 95 percent of diamonds left the country this way, (Keen 2003, 76).

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the mantle of informal opposition was taken up by radical student groups from Freetown Universities, notably from the Fourah Bay College. These drew inspiration from pan-Africanism, the Libyan leader Gadaffi's *Green Book*,

and the legacy of “veteran radical” I.T.A . Wallace Johnson, (Richards 1996, 53). The cohort to which these radical students belonged differed from ones of the past, in that most youth had attained some level of primary and secondary education, with corresponding higher levels of literacy and of political awareness. Many within this group were forced to drop out, and were unable to find jobs in the rapidly contracting public and private sectors. Under these circumstances, solidarity grew between radical students and the youth underclass of labourers and dropouts, generating common anti-social language and practices that gave expression to their political frustrations and hopes, (Abdullah 2004). A period of youth-government confrontations started in 1977, when student protests against Stevens met a brutal counter-demonstration by the APC Youth League backed up by the President’s paramilitary Internal Security Unit. The ensuing anti-APC protest movement spread around the city and ended with the death of 40 people, (Rashid 2004, 75). This had been a significant attempt by the youth to carve out a strategic enclave from which to challenge the injustice of the exclusive and repressive patrimonial system.

The economy went into steep decline in the 1980s, due to a combination of factors, including a dramatic drop in mining revenue and in the price of raw materials. Public sector retrenchment prescribed by economic restructuring of the World Bank, in combination with the shortfall in resources, created a crisis of patrimonialism that badly affected the legitimacy of the state, causing then President, General Momoh, to organize a referendum on multiparty elections by the early 1990s, (Richards 1996, 41). Rampant corruption damaged the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of those who did not benefit from patrimonial networks but who depended on its services. Spending on education plummeted, and by 1987, less than 30 percent of those of a secondary school age were attending school, (Keen 2003, 80). Justice became commodified, and chieftdom authorities, the guardians of customary local rights and dispensaries of law and order could purchase their titles.

3.2 Who fought, and why

The war against the state broke out on two fronts: on the border, where the Liberian-sponsored Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led a small invasion in 1991, and in the capital, in an entirely separate coup by the neglected military, which formed a National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in 1992. These strikes can be interpreted as acts of collective

strategic agency by youth that had exhausted the limits of tactical agency. War had become, for the initial recruits, a preferable and more viable option to social improvement.

Abdullah *et.al* (2004) have disputed the intellectual origins of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as the basis for understanding the logic of its brutal character, argued by Richards (1996). They assert that the nature of the war is better understood by the social character of the movement, and that while the intellectual origins of the RUF drew upon this heritage of the critical student-led militancy, this educated leadership parted ways with an undisciplined “lumpen” element that went on to form the initial cadre and recruitment pool of the insurgency. Others have objected to the implication of an inherently violent lumpen youth culture as explanation for the brutal character of the war, and have sought instead to understand the motivations of voluntary recruitment, (Fanthorpe 2001; Peters 2004; Richards 2005; Bøås & Dunn 2007).

The war began in March 1991, with the invasion of about a hundred guerilla fighters from Liberia. The RUF force grew rapidly with a mixture of coerced and voluntary recruitment. Abdullah *et.al* (2004) have broken down the label of lumpen youth into three main groups. The “urban marginals,” were those under-educated and -employed youth who were hired as thugs by competing parties in the early period of independence, and who later found common cause with the student radicals in the 1970s and 80s. Many joined the expanding ranks of the army under the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) junta in 1992. Second were the “socially-disconnected village youth,” who were motivated by their frustration with local chiefs, their inability to continue their education, and their freedom from social obligation. A third group were the illicit miners of the diamond-mining areas who were “vulnerable to official harassment, and often working for Mandingo or Lebanese traders,” as well as those involved in illegal logging and smuggling, (Keen 2003, 78). Quantitative research of the ex-combatants indicates that it was predominantly the later two groups, from the rural backgrounds, who filled the ranks of the RUF and Kamajor or Civil Defense Forces (CDF), and that most were recruited from the rural Eastern Province bordering Liberia, (Richards 2005, 574). These combatants were mainly primary school pupils and secondary school dropouts, many of whom had taken up mining, (Peters 2004, 9).

Peters (2004) describes three principal reasons that young ex-combatants had for voluntarily fighting: overcoming economic constraints and meeting their own material

needs, searching for alternative educational opportunities, and reversing the victimhood of political exclusion. Though most owed their survival of the war to the classical tactical agency described by Honwana (2005), on another level, war had allowed them to carve out, literally, a terrain which they dominated. Exhibiting a form of strategic agency, new patrons - warlords and commanders - emerged to replace the local big men who had fled with the start of the violence. The benefits for rank and file combatants were mainly short term, often obtained through 'pay yourself' operations. Education, especially higher education, had long remained out of reach for those without the sponsorship of patrons. And with war came the destruction of schools, and a lack of alternatives for youth. Joining a militia offered the potential for learning new skills, whether through the "bush schools" of the RUF, or for members of the CDF, by continuing farming and education on the side. However most saw this time as wasted, and viewed education as central for preventing re-mobilization. Third, weapons, which could be used "to fulfill economic needs [or...] to achieve political changes," were great levelers for youth. This newfound power combined with the appeal of a merit-based systems of advance, and with transparent, simple, and stringent rules, including a Code of Conduct in the case of the RUF, did much to empower youth who had earlier been subject to the injustices of local gerontocracy and nepotism, (Peters 2004, 27).

3.3 The grievances of rural youth

Many rural youth have linked their motivations for joining the RUF to the abuses of chiefs under this system, and to their need for protection, or for revenge, (Richards 2005, 578). Arbitrary fines and tribute were mechanisms used to extract labour from young men and to keep them tied to the land. Young men found themselves in competition with older, wealthy men for access to women, both because of the cost of the bridewealth, and because chiefs have monopolized women through the practice of polygyny,⁴ it was common for young men to be fined with marriage infringement, or "woman damage" if they were found to be involved in a relationship with a chief's woman. In contrast, youth with connections to the chieftaincy were spared these abuses, and were given privileged treatment with regard to land access, (Richards 2005, 578; Fanthorpe 2001, 384).

⁴ The most common form of polygamy, where a a man has two or more wives at the same time.

Richards (2005) traces the roots of these abuses to the nineteenth century era of the domestic slave trade, which provided chiefs with labour for farming. Chiefs exercised social control through local courts, and the institution of polygyny. Richards also links the early patrimonial loyalties to the practice by warlords of the Mano River forest to use ‘warboys’, young men, often with no local connection, for slave raids. These warboys were in turn loyal to the patrons who fed, clothed and provided them with women, (Richards 2005, 580). Chiefs resisted pressure from the international community to end the domestic slave trade (which did not end until 1928), and perpetuated *de facto* domestic slavery through “unpaid community labour levied disproportionately on the younger and poorer members of rural society,” (Mokuwa & Richards 2006, 3).

Fanthorpe (2001) adds to the understanding of processes of marginalization of rural youth who were not part of landed lineages. The creation of a ‘lumpen agency’, he asserts, is not strictly due to a crisis of patrimonialism, triggered by the decline of the economy, but rather the result of longer term grievances linked to practices for generating local identity, which had become exclusionary under the Native Administration (1896). Historic settlement practices of land clearing and enclosure, and the sanction of powerful local leaders, initiated strangers and their descendants into communities, and established their entitlements. Under the Native Administration, the colonial state “ossified” boundaries and “custom” to facilitate tax collection. This was done through the village tax register, which was implemented by an expanded chieftaincy system with new levels of sub-chiefs, and by formalizing the “‘customary’ rights [of these chiefs] to extract tribute and labour from their subjects” which disproportionately affected young socially-disconnected men, (Fanthorpe 2001, 380). Chiefs retained custody of the land (with the exception of mineral resources, which were claimed by the colonial government) as well as the power to adjudicate in local courts. Selection of Paramount Chiefs, a life-time position, was to be done by Tribal Authorities, which consisted of the headmen of villages counting at least twenty tax payers.

The role of chiefs was further distorted from its original inclusive, community-building function under post-colonial governments. With the joining of the Sierra Leone Colony and the Protectorate under the 1951 Constitution, chiefs became a tool for rural elites to reverse the colonial era status quo, which the Freetown Krio elite had dominated. The

use of chiefs, who have tended to hold enormous sway with local populations, as political brokers to control public opinion, has continued ever since, (Fanthrope 2001, 383).

3.4 Politics and exploitation in the Kono District

It was in Kono District where diamonds were first discovered, and began to be commercially mined, during the 1930s. The bitter sense of injustice that continues to prevail among people in the region is rooted in a history of resource exploitation by a locally unaccountable elite - both foreign and national. The predominant form of diamond mining in Sierra Leone is alluvial rather than industrial; it is done on the banks of rivers, streams and in swamps on a seasonal basis, using rudimentary tools - shovels, sieves and pails, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 21). However, access to the best diamond fields has historically been determined by powerful commercial and political interests, at the cost of youth access to livelihoods. For twenty years during colonial rule, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), a subsidiary of De Beers, held the exclusive rights to diamond mining and tightly controlled diamond fields with paramilitary enforcement, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 13). All individual mining by non-autochthonous miners was declared illegal, with chiefs accordingly given the power to distinguish “strangers”, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 14). Company securities regularly clashed with young illegal diamond miners, (Rosen 2005, 74).

A migration boom in the 1950s and 60s brought an estimated 35,000 strangers into Kono, (Reno 2003, 49) outnumbering the indigenous Kono people, (Rosen 2005, 75). These predominantly male youth dreamed of escaping poverty and striking fortune, but with diamond mining restricted to a large foreign firm, these people had to seek the protection of chiefs to pursue their mining activities. The punishment for illegal diamond mining (IDM) or prospecting was harsh, including:

...arrest, expulsion, a fine and up to six months in prison, and if they were found in possession of a sieve, shovel, a shaker, pickaxe, or any other tool that could be used for prospecting or mining they could receive up to twelve months in prison with hard labour, (Rosen 2005, 75).

Chiefs derived “informal social control” through this new power, and were able to command the loyalty of the strangers they protected by choosing not to report their illegal mining activities, (Reno 2003, 50). In other words, the designation of “strangers” had intensified a dependence of youth upon patrons that was economically motivated.

Alluvial mining was not legalized for individual Sierra Leoneans and their companies until 1956, with the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance. This concession had been prompted by a protest staged by miners in defense of “their rights to engage in small-scale mining”, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 14). Through the new scheme, the colonial government hoped to curtail illegal mining, and to pre-empt miners from appealing to populist independence-era party politics to demand a share of the richest diamond deposits, (Reno 2003, 51) though the scheme of course reserved the richest deposits for the SLST. Chiefs retained the power, under the alluvial mining license scheme, to determine strangers and to allocate licenses. But only the wealthy and politically well-connected, who could afford licenses, normally foreigners, dominated the market, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 14).

During the period leading to independence, the power chiefs had over mining gangs became politicized by the competition between the national parties, which exerted pressure to grant licenses to political supporters. The southern-based SLPP dominated, but the new APC, which had a strong northern power base, found support in Kono’s migrant community, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 14). In the same period, the government launched the first of several military operations to drive out the strangers, but with little effect. IDM continued to thrive in the absence of what was considered to be fair license allocation, and rather than stamping out the illegal diamond trade, the military became involved, accepting bribes to turn a blind eye, and setting the pattern which was to continue during the war.

In 1968, under the new APC government, Stevens consolidated his power over diamond resources, both for personal enrichment and to enable him to reward political allies. The function of the Government Diamond Office was converted from smuggling prevention, to *de facto* facilitation. By lowering the cost it paid for diamonds, well-placed officials were able to reap marginal profits while official diamond mining revenues plummeted, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 15). The authority to issue mining licenses was also transferred to the Ministry of Mines, bypassing the chiefs, and enabling the central government to reward loyal APC supporters, and to extend its control over IDM gangs for terrorizing and cowing dissidents. Chiefs therefore sided with Stevens and the APC at the cost of their own independent control over the IDM gangs, (Reno 2003, 51-52). Lacking rights or secure employment, the largely immigrant, krio-speaking population of young illegal diamond miners in Kono was at the service of patrons, who were, in turn, controlled by the central govern-

ment. Through the APC Youth wing of the national party, these youth were mobilized into thuggery and state-sponsored violence, (Rosen 2005, 78-79).

The APC Youth was especially destructive in the upriver diamond fields of the Kono District, where the government exercised greater control over chiefs. The government's focus on Kono stemmed from its status as the only district to possess kimberlite (deep shaft) mining deposits, accessible only via industrial technologies that require large-scale capital investment. Securing the political power base in Kono through chiefs was the key to lucrative government - private sector collusion in the industry, (Reno 2003, 52). Chiefs who supported the APC, or who relied on APC to remain in power, were able to enrich themselves. These arrangements fed the division between local authority and the poor and marginalized who were not part of the networks of beneficiaries. Chiefs who did not support the APC could be removed from power, with consequences for the client youths they left behind, who became exposed to the abuses of Freetown officials and business interests and in some cases were driven out of mining sites, (Reno 2003, 53).

Youth alienation in Kono continued to foment under these circumstances. In mid 1990, the successor Momoh regime oversaw as many as 30,000 youth driven off the land in IDM clearing operations "Clean Sweep", then "Clear All." Both operations were staged under the rubric of structural adjustment policies that sought to choke off smuggling and to regulate diamond production and capture revenue, (Reno 2003, 57). The resulting massive pool of alienated youth threw its support behind the RUF at the start of the war, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 16). The unfair treatment of youth by local and national authorities in Kono stood in contrast to their counterparts downriver in the Southern Province - SLPP strongholds where mining was exclusively alluvial and held less interest for the predatory state. In this region, chiefs effectively utilized local initiation rites (*Poro*) to mobilize anti-APC support, and retained greater social control over IDM gangs. Youth recruitment in this area fed predominantly into the comparatively disciplined and loyal CDF, (Reno 2003, 54).

Initially during the war, diamond resources were exploited by parties to the conflict on an opportunistic, ad hoc basis. But as the war progressed, the government lost what little remained of its control of the diamond trade to the youth that made up the army, private security forces and insurgency groups, as these parties alternately fought and colluded for control of these and other resources, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 17). By 1998, the cross-border dia-

mond-for-arms trade with Charles Taylor had become “the modus operandi” of the RUF that fueled the conflict, (Bøås & Hatløy 2006, 17). National and international strategies for ending the war shifted from “curtailing rebel access” to diamonds through the use of military force, to accommodation of RUF leader Foday Sankoh in the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord, (de Koning 2008, 6). The rebel movement was finally defeated in the summer of 2000, both militarily, by British Special Forces, Guinean troops, and a UNAMSIL force armed with a more robust mandate, and by the pressure placed on it and its Liberian patron through UN sanctions on diamond exports from Sierra Leone, (de Koning 2008, 6).

3.5 The employment challenge

For many of the demobilized combatants, war time is was experienced as a period where they were able to meet their material needs, and for this reason the period sometimes is romanticized in hindsight, (Christensen 2007). While 72,490 passed through the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), the programme was undermined by significant shortcomings: its failure to deliver the expected reintegration packages, the difficulty faced by ex-combatants in validating their status and thereby claiming their entitlements, and an “urban bias” in the design of employment schemes which failed to recognize the “rural crisis” at the root of the war, (Peters 2006 121-122). A study of the DDR process conducted in 2004 found that fighters from all sides were largely “underprivileged individuals who had been failed by the Sierra Leonean State,” (Humphreys & Weinstein 2004, cited in ICG 2007, 10). The same study estimated that a quarter of those who entered DDR did not participate in a training programme, and that of those who completed the programme, only 42 percent had found jobs, (ICG 2007, 10).

The vast majority of young people in Sierra Leone continue to be caught in the limbo between access to education and employment. Although primary school fees have been abolished, secondary school fees force many to drop out from the age of 13 to seek employment, (Women’s Commission 2008). At 34 percent, the country has among the world’s lowest literacy rates, (HDR 2007, 32). A startling fact is that although youth make up 59 percent of the labour force, but only 4% are paid employees, (2004 Population and Housing Census cited in HDR 2007, 42). The majority of youth work in the agricultural sector and are unpaid, fueling rural-urban economic migration, (Women’s Commission 2008). Most

are self-employed in petty trades and services. Lack of private sector investment and an oversupply of low-skilled labour drive down the employment opportunities and conditions for most youth.

3.6 Reforming local governance

Since the end of the war, government has sought to address the conditions that led to youth alienation and conflict, including by enhancing public participation in local governance, reversing the trend towards centralization of power that had been the pattern since independence, (Jackson 2006). The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission assigned responsibility to the impunity of political elites, who “plundered the nation’s assets, including its mineral riches, at the expense of the national good. Government accountability was non-existent...”, (TRC Report, cited in Fanthorpe 2005, 29). But public consultations and more recent fieldwork have revealed the complexity of local governance, with continued popular support for paramount and lower chiefs, alongside the acknowledged need for special representation of previously excluded groups, (Jackson 2006, 103; Sawyer: 2008). At the same time, there has been well-founded concern that the reinstatement of patrimonial rule, through the chieftaincy, could re-marginalize youth and re-create the conditions for conflict, (Richards 2005).

In 2000 the Chieftaincy system had been restored, though few changes have been made. Chiefs continue to be elected for life by local elites, “strangers” continue to lack political and property rights, women continue to lack equitable inheritance rights, and youth continue to be prosecuted for marriage breaches, all of this signifying that the continued monopoly by landed classes of for the control of labour, (Richards 2006, 31). The persistence of the grievances of a rural underclass fuels the continuation of a “hyper-mobility” between mining and agriculture, to the detriment of sectoral innovation and skills-development, (Richards 2006, 30).

So far, the record on public participation has been mixed, with evidence that local decision-making has yet to become inclusive of poor and marginalized, (Maconachie 2008, 12). In the area of community-based natural resource management, Diamond Area Community Development Funds (DACDF) were set up in 2001, in order to provide an incentive for chieftaincies to engage in legal diamond mining activities, by returning 3% of diamond ex-

port taxes to Chieftaincy Development Committees (CDC), to be spent on small-scale local development projects. However, in practice, CDC's continue to be made up of mostly male elites, (Maconachie 2008, 10). This is also reflected in national policies within the sector, which have adopted a "legality approach" that prioritizes revenue generation by formalizing mining activities, and favours more easily regulated industrial over artisanal mining. This approach "risks disenfranchising those with limited means to formalise their position in the commodity chain," (de Koning 2008, 20). Furthermore, it mitigates the scope for addressing the underlying structural problems which continue to marginalize youth, such as property and land use rights, limited agricultural production and employment generation, (de Koning 2008, 11).

The recent rise in politically-motivated actions by youth against mining companies is evidence that marginalized groups, including underemployed, and politically disconnected youth, strain to be heard in these decision-making processes and therefore seek out alternative ways of influencing decisions. Most remarkably, was perhaps the peaceful protest in December 2007, staged against the South African Koidu Holdings Mining Company by aggrieved property owners who had lived for five years within the blasting envelope, for tardy and inadequate compensation, which descended into violence after police forcefully intervened, gunning down two protesters. The report of the independent Jenkins-Johnson enquiry included among its recommendations, that future processes of granting prospecting or exploration licenses, or mining lease involve the Landowners (e.g. native communities) in the negotiations, particularly with respect to delimitation of boundaries, and also specifies a fiscal regime to regulate the proportion of profits to return to landowners (e.g. 1/3 of 40%), (GoSL White Paper 2008, 7). The Koidu Holdings protest was followed by similar episodes of youth and worker unrest directed towards at least five mining companies in Kono District,⁵ involving incidents ranging from strikes, land occupations, demonstrations and mediated negotiations.

The establishment of a democratic architecture of local governance, alongside the reinstated 149 chieftaincies, under the Local Government Act (2004), has been intended to recalibrate the level of local participation in decision-making. Nineteen Local Councils,

⁵ In chronological order: Koidu Holdings Ltd. in Tankoro Chiefdom, AV Charge in Nimiyama Chiefdom, Mile Stone in Sandor Chiefdom, Swanfield Mining Company in Niminkoro Chiefdom, and Kariba Kono Ltd, in Gbense Chiefdom.

abolished in 1972 by Stevens, were re-established, mandated with promoting development, and the ability to raise taxes for this purpose, (HDR 2007, xvi). The delineation of powers between chieftaincies and local councils is not thoroughly clear on paper and creates a new sources of potential conflict, for instance in the area of finance, and the administrative capacity both of councils and of chieftaincies remains weak. Decentralization is still in its infancy, and bodies such as Ward Committees are not the fora of vibrant and broad-based community debate they are intended to be, (HDR 2007, xix). Sierra Leone's 2007 Human Development Report asserts that among the new LC's there is "little evidence as yet of a more democratic system with people involved in decisions," (HDR 2007, xviii). At the same time, patrimonialism continues to be a strong force behind political engagement, particularly at the level of the chieftaincy, where chiefs continue to act as political brokers for national parties, locking them into relations of mutual dependence with MPs, with no downward accountability, (Jackson 2006, 101). For example, in the mining sector, fiscal decentralization of "centrally collected taxes among diamond producing chiefdoms" and the devolution of licensing to chiefdom levels, which presents an opportunity for community involvement, is undermined by the lack of "transparency and responsiveness of chiefly authorities," and "risks generating local resentment," (de Koning 2008, 21).

3.7 Social change, and enhanced youth agency?

Ethnographic perspectives view war not as a singularly negative phenomenon, but as competing social processes of continuity and change, (Richards 2005, 17). Struggles for social and economic restructuring and preservation do not begin and end with war, but are ongoing. At the same time, war has a transformative impact on culture:

...war does more than merely disrupt or destroy existing social systems; it also creates new systems. Although cruel, ugly, and inhuman, war is by its very nature an instrument for social and economic restructuring, (Boas 2007, 40).

The violence of war disrupted old social systems. Chiefs and institutions representing authority were targeted by the RUF. Social fabric was ripped. Young people, torn from their families and forced to commit atrocities as children, feared returning to their communities after the war. Girls who had survived the violence of life in the bush, in addition to often dealing with sexually transmitted disease, faced the double stigma upon return of being

marked as disobedient rebels and damaged goods, (Coulter 2006). A whole generation suffered the consequences of disrupted education, devastated physical infrastructure, social and economic capital, and broken social trust after the war ended. The war also gave many young people unprecedented power amidst heightened insecurity, and humanitarian processes brought them into contact with international norms of human rights and social justice that have been incorporated into general discourses of power and exploitation.

New social systems were forged in the crucible of war. Post-war social changes are evident in the “weakening of the patronage system” between the central government and provincial towns, the parallel “resurgence of associational life (through which broad groups organise on the basis of a common interest - livelihoods, leisure, activity or residence - to increase their chances of survival), and renewed demands for government accountability,” (ICG 2008, 5). Several ethnographic studies have documented how militia cultures have transformed themselves with the end of war, showing an apparent shift towards strategic agency.

Studies of the motivations of ex-RUF combatants, have described how their socialization into the culture of the insurgency affected what they would tolerate after the war ended, (Richards 1996; Peters 2004). In addition to skills of battle survival, RUF combatants were inculcated into the norms and values of egalitarianism, including rules governing the distribution of resources, free access to schooling through “bush schools” and health care, codes of conduct and people’s courts, and principle of meritocracy enabling upward mobility in command structure. These stood in stark contrast to the nepotism and exclusion of elite patrimonial networks, that privileged access to secondary education, scholarships and jobs, (Peters 2004). Youth who found that jobs and support promised as part of DDR was not forthcoming openly discussed the option of re-mobilisation, where these needs would be met, (Peters 2004). Politically, these youth had grown accustomed to the power of the gun, and in interviews some expressed their inability to quietly readjust to a society where they continued to be politically sidelined. In one unexceptional example, a young man suspected of being with the RUF openly challenged the Chief, the later having escaped during the war, for excluding the youth who had stayed behind and fought from making decisions about the allocation of humanitarian relief, (Peters 2004, 29). Such examples dem-

onstrate strategic attempts by youth to redefine what are considered to be acceptable power relations.

Militia solidarities and moral communities evolved during the course of the war. Fithen and Richards (2005) have explored how the strength of rules and cohesiveness of militia groups explain the trajectory of the war's violence, and the evolution of social norms. According to this perspective, the RUF, originally held together in significant part by its desire for a more equal society, disintegrated into fatalistic anarchy when the egalitarian life they had practiced in the camps of the Gola Forest proved incompatible with the need for centralised in military operations. Its retreat into illegitimacy among civilians, and the betrayal of several peace agreements compounded this crisis of solidarity, (Fithen & Richards 2005, 126). The CDF, also known as the Kamajors, transformed a traditional and mystical practice of solitary hunting into effective fighting units. With the end of the war, CDF hierarchies returned to an 'entrepreneurial individualism', prompted by the need to re-establish themselves in their communities, (Fithen & Richards 2005, 133).

To some extent, these militia solidarities and norms were carried forth into peacetime enterprises. The return to individualism with the CDF, combined with a wisened civilian population to break down the tradition of unquestioning respect for chiefly patrimonial authority. Fithen and Richards see evidence of CDF individualism, and of RUF egalitarianism, in the move away from the dependency of patrimonialism towards self-employment and horizontal associations (Fithen and Richards 2005, 134). They cite the case of the Bo Town Bike Renter's Association, started by former CDF members to fill a gap in the market for a taxi service, which became a huge source of employment for ex-combatants of all sides, (Fithen and Richards 2005, 134). As a registered company that is run and staffed almost entirely by ex-combatants, it demonstrates a significant shift towards strategic agency of these youth who now use commercial law as a leveling weapon to defend themselves against the abuses of authorities, (Richards 2006, 30).

A study by Christensen and Utas (2008) of youth and more specifically, remobilized ex-combatants in the 2007 General election, highlights examples of how youth tactically navigated the shifting political terrain to create strategic possibilities. They reveal how youth, who served as resources for politicians, were able to thwart attempts by patrons to manipulate them and to turn these situations to their own advantage in a number of ways.

The outcome of the 2007 General Election was by no means a foregone conclusion. The incumbent SLPP party had been favoured to win the election in 2005, but certainty had been thrown into question when the infant PMDC party broke off, taking a proportion of the party supporters with it. Tensions mounted with the polarizing run-off election held on September 8th, between APC candidate Koroma and SLPP Berewa, during which PMDC threw its support behind the APC party, (IRIN August 2007a). Many youth maximized the opportunities presented by this uncertain contest, supporting and collecting benefits from multiple parties, but in the end jostling to be on the winning side, in what became known as *watermelon politics*, (Christensen & Utas 2008). The term “*watermelon politics*”, after the hit song by pop musician Daddy Saj, captured a new phenomenon of political two-timing: of being green on the surface and collecting benefits from SLPP, while being red underneath, and voting APC. This trend was seen to be a break with social norms reciprocity, as expressed in the symbolic exchange of the cola nut - “a gift which entails a moral obligation,” (Utas 2007, 62). Economic rather than moral imperatives underlie watermelon politics and “mercenary democracy” more generally. But far from amoral, “doing watermelon” was seen to be a legitimate response to the vote-buying of corrupt politicians, and its absorption as a term into mainstream terminology signified a popular defense of this new practice, (Utas 2007; Christensen & Utas 2008, 530).

Utas (2007) has proposed that the collective impact of many youth taking the money from one party while voting for another may yield positive unintended consequences for democratic consolidation, by stealing the potency out of vote-buying and forcing parties to appeal to ideals rather than pocketbooks, (Utas 2007, 65). There is, indeed, reason to read optimism into this behaviour. Loyalty to patrons as a social value and an organizing principle in politics can prevent people from uniting on the basis of shared interests and ideals that cut across societal cleavages. The mercenary motivations of youth show that such values are not unassailable, and may in fact be declining in importance. They empower youth by enabling them to make a freer choice about whom to support in elections.

However, it is important not to overstate the agency of watermelon politics and other shape shifting behaviours of youth in the public sphere. In Honwana’s terms, watermelon politics is the result of tactical agency which manipulates existing options within a system of power relations to the advantage of the agent, rather than directly shaping that system and

the choices available to them in a strategic manner. As a result, youth experiences of enhanced agency are, in large part, determined by political circumstances and configurations of power, such as the uncertain victory of either APC or SLPP in the second run-off. And as a consequence, their power ebbs with the changing of these circumstances once elections are over. The counter, and less hopeful, and even depressing, interpretation of this predominant form of agency is that while youth may enhance their own prospects through these actions, in doing so, they help to recreate the very system that limits their options. By playing into the politics of the dominant parties, youth bypass the opportunity to create political alternatives that are more responsive to their needs.

Tactical agency during the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections was also prominent among ex-combatants, who were remobilized from militia factions into partisan security squads tasked with protecting candidates and party offices, as well as creating “a general state of panic,” (Christensen & Utas 2008, 522). With few exceptions, they were not driven by ideological convictions or personal loyalties. Rather, supporting a political party was viewed instrumentally, for the many opportunities the elections presented. Many youth viewed the elections as their “last chance” to benefit after neither the war nor demobilization had improved their social standing. Their motivations ranged from the personal protection from police and government officials afforded by their political connections; the social aspects of living with former militia units, considered family; the immediate needs of money, food and shelter; to longer term prospects, including promises of jobs and education, (Christensen & Utas 2008, 423-429). They viewed politicians with deep mistrust, for having punished them after the war with imprisonment, and they were keenly aware of the strictly transactional nature of this relationship of necessity. But while entering into a relation with politicians may have expanded their social possibilities, their mode of engagement in the elections was pre-defined, drawing only on their violent resources to serve as implementers of political dispensations.

Attempts to break the mold of tactical agency were evident among one group of youth during this election. In a more sinister variation of ‘*doing watermelon*’, ex-combatants, unwilling to tie their fortunes to any one party, carved out a third option for themselves by leveraging their power to intimidate politicians and extort payments on the

night time '*politician patrol*,' (Christensen & Utas, 2008, 531). However, the strategic nature of this agency was, to a large extent, also conditional upon the electoral context.

In contrast to the evidence of changing social norms and increasing independence, Bøås (2007) highlights the continuities in pre and post-war deference to patrons. He illustrates the paradox of youth such as Maskita Bockarie who, in becoming warlords, replicated the behaviours and inequalities of the system against which they had spent their entire lives struggling. He illustrates a typical path for marginalized youth who, frustrated by the arduous and humiliating experience of life as victims of poverty, corruption, and limited social options, were drawn into war in a last-ditch attempt to have a future. Some discovered affirmation in their rise to power within society. But power in these circumstances was a zero-sum resource, to be enjoyed by the warlord, at the expense of those he had to stand upon to achieve those heights. "What started as a social revolt ended up as a perverted version of the state the movement initially rebelled against," (Bøås 2007, 51). If practices such as watermelon politics and 'tricks' lead us to question the apparent marginality of youth and to re-evaluate the limits of their agency, then stories of youth such as Bockarie who may pay a high moral price to ascend beyond the ranks of their former patrons lead us to question their apparent power, and the actual extent of their agency in relation to structural constraints and imperatives.

The use of commercial law, and the extortion of politicians represent evidence that youth, for better or worse, are challenging the unquestioning authority of elders and titles, and are actively shaping, and leveling their world. Custom, for many, is no longer a good enough reason to live by certain social rules, if these rules discriminate against them. However, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, these are islands of strategic agency in a patrimonial context where marginalized youth cannot always afford the cost of independence. The small, subversive victories of watermelon politics may well bring about welcome change by making politicians realize that votes are earned, not bought. But these tactical strikes against the establishment are indirect, displaying a reluctance to bite the hand that feeds. Hope for democratic consolidation must first confront and address the fact that youth are part of the system that oppresses them.

3.8 The significance of the 2008 Local Elections in Kono District

The 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections were the first post-conflict elections to be organized by the country's National Electoral Commission since the UN-supervised elections in 2002. They oversaw an historic peaceful transfer of power from SLPP to APC, marred only by isolated incidents of violence, (ACE 2007). Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC party won the presidency in a tight run-off contest against SLPP candidate Solomon Berewa, returning power to the party that had last ruled the country for three decades as an authoritarian regime into the final gasps of failed statehood. In the final count, the APC party won 59 seats out of 112 seats in Parliament, with SLPP receiving 45 and PMDC 10, (SL Encyclopedia 2008).

The SLPP party, credited with ending the war, had come to power in a landslide election in 2002; but in power it had been a disappointment, blamed by many for the economic mismanagement and high level corruption that held back the country's recovery, (BBC 2007). The incumbent party was defeated by a protest vote, delivered both by groups who had been excluded from ethno-regional redistribution, but also from within the party's southern Mende supporters, (Mateo 2007). These were mainly younger people, who, frustrated with the gerontocratic party establishment, followed veteran leader Charles Margai into the splintered PMDC party, and then went on to support the APC in the run-off, (ICG 2008, 3). Demographics,⁶ combined with the general acceptance of youth exclusion as a cause of past and potential future conflict, dictated that all parties fiercely courted the "youth vote." Youth were placed at the centre of party political strategies, in terms of the issues, their participation in rallies and voter mobilization, and leading street-level confrontations between parties, (Mateo 2007). But the voting behaviour of individual youths continued to be determined primarily by ethno-regional factors and the need for change, rather than by any explicit and self-aware "youth consciousness", (Mateo 2007).

Ethno-regional considerations guided Ernest Bai Koroma's choice of running mate, Sahr Samuel Sam-Sumana. The choice of the native Kono investor for Vice President was linked to the District's status as a swing state (Concord Times 2008) which, since independence, had tended to follow the political pendulum at the centre. Kono was coloured green in

⁶ Forty percent of the 2.6 million people registered to vote in the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections were under the age of 27, (IRIN 2007).

the 2002 landslide election for the SLPP, when the party won 86.6 % of the votes, compared to only 8.6% for APC, (SL Web [website]). But the outcome of the 2007 run off was far less predictable, with SLPP failing to win “the anticipated support”, (Christensen & Utas 2008, 532). In Koidu, tension ahead of the run-off erupted into violence as SLPP and APC party supporters clashed in the street and a curfew was imposed, (APA 2007).

In Kono however, the final outcome was an anomaly, with the opposition SLPP holding seven out of eight seats, and an eagerly awaited Vice President⁷ who lacked a mandate by his home constituency. Under these highly reactive conditions, the local elections which followed less than a year later, took on greater significance. They presented a chance to correct the imbalance, colouring over the green with red, and to prove the popularity of the still new APC government. Vice President Sam-Sumana, son of Kono soil, and new patron of the youth in the district was the ticket to delivering the needed sea change.

The combination of these factors made the stakes for local elections higher in Kono than in other areas. Adding to the volatility was the large contingent of underemployed youth, dominated by ex-combatants, and the timing of the election, which followed on the heels of a spate of confrontations with mining companies, including that with Koidu Holdings Ltd which had ended with two dead, (IRIN 28 December 2007). Fears of violence ran high in the newspapers and among opposition supporters that Kono was “hot” and that violence could easily spark. The APC expended significant resources in colouring the Kono map red, and once again the APC Youth League swept across the district, mobilizing young voters to vote for their brother Sam-Sumana. Although the local elections were found to be peaceful and credible, (SL Encyclopedia 2008b) the campaign period was marred by isolated incidents of political violence and intimidation. In the one major incident of the campaign, APC youth reportedly crashed the SLPP rally day scheduled for June 13th, pelting stones and jeering, cutting the rally short and forcing the police hastily escort to visiting opposition leader Solomon Berewa away from the scene, (Tankoro Police [Interview 64]). Acts of intimidation were believed by many to be intended to discourage opposition and independent candidates from running. An official working with the National Electoral Com-

⁷ While providing the resources to pull the country out of poverty, Kono had always lacked its own high level representation, and remained a backwater in terms of development. To date, the district lacks running water and electricity is provided only by generators. The appointment of a Kono man as VP was unprecedented, and widely perceived to herald an opportunity for development to finally arrive.

mission observed that of the 18 out of 70 candidates who had withdrawn their nominations, a disproportionate number, was from Kono, and that of these, none represented the APC party, (NEC, Freetown, 2008 [Interview 12]). Walking through the streets of Koidu town, Kono's main city, it was clear which party was dominant - almost all opposition party posters, with the exception of ones on the inside of a few brave shops, had been torn down. The final results brought a clear victory for the APC, which won 253 out of 456 councilor seats. In Kono however, the APC wiped out the competition, winning 22 out of 24 seats, (NEC 2008).

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 *The ‘attack’ on No.11*

“No.11 was not a protest - just survival,” I was corrected. “Just move for the youth because suffering plenty! Just make benefit for the youth” (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 77]).

On April 23rd 2008, large numbers of youth invaded the site of a diamondiferous sand hill owned by Kariba Kono Ltd. and started washing the gravel for diamonds. The No.11 oversize dump, located near the town of Sefadu in the chiefdom of Gbense, is a small mountain of previously mined alluvial sand tailings from various of the surrounding chiefdoms. Over the years, several companies have held rights for retreatment, starting with the Sierra Leone Selection Trust in the 1960s, and currently by Kariba Kono Ltd. Measured at 4.7 million cubic meters of sand, (Mineral Commodities 2006) it would take a good five minutes to walk its periphery.

The attack on the No.11 *sansan* was not spontaneous. During the 2007 election campaign, a promise had been made by the APC party, and specifically by Vice President Sam Sumana, that if they won the elections, the party would distribute the sand to the Kono youth. Some had heard this promise announced at the large Community Field gathering place at a political rally for the APC during the 2007 campaign, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]); others had heard it broadcast over the radio (Gunpoint Youth/No.11 [Interview 97]); and many only knew of it through word of mouth. But all were aware of this promise. Then in September 2007 APC was elected and the new government sworn in, and by April 2008 they had still not made good on their promise to the youth who had been a pivotal constituency in their election. When asked what had sparked them into action, most youth I spoke to pointed to the same provocative statement over local radio by an opposition MP T.E. Kaingbanja, who was gave a thirty minute interview slating the APC party for reneging on its promise to the youth to distribute the sand (No.11 Leader [Interview 102]). The youth attacked the sand the very next day.

News of that the youth had taken the sand spread rapidly, and new youth came from near and afar to seize the opportunity for enrichment. For five days they came in increasing numbers, from all parts of the country, estimated to be over a thousand in number, (No.11 Site Supervisor [Interview 58]).⁸ They brought shovels, buckets, rice bags and shakers to carry the sand, (Gunpoint Youths/No.11 [Interview 103]).

With youth swarming the sand, chieftdom and government officials met with company representatives and attempted to hastily broker a compromise with Kariba to divide the sand, but found that the rights to processing of the dump belonged exclusively and legally, with the company. The APC party had been embarrassingly caught out in a promise that wasn't its to make, though it is not clear at which point this became general knowledge. The youth were clearly trying to force the hand of the ruling party. In a politically loaded act, several individuals ran a red flag up to the top of the sand hill, planting it in the centre, next to the solitary tree growing at the top of the heap. Taking their plight to the airwaves, the Chairman of the District APC Youth League broke ranks with his party, reprimanding it for failing to keep its promise on BBC radio, (APC Youth League Chairman [Interview 16]). Meanwhile the youth, encouraged by rumours that a deal had been reached with the company, and others out of defiance, kept going to the *sansan*. By day 3, the company site supervisor estimated that they were more than a thousand – young men and women – and began transporting the sand out of the site for treatment elsewhere. The company called the police, who were unable to control the crowd. Youth set up roadblocks, (No.11 Site Supervisor [Interview 58]). By day five, the police came with reinforcements from the army and police from other districts, (No.11 Site Supervisor [Interview 58]). Chaos broke out as police rounded up 67 of them into vehicles using tear gas, and took them to the Tankoro police station, (Tankoro Police [Interview 64]). They were pursued by angry riotous mobs back into Koidu city, heading directly to the Tankoro police station which they attempted to set on fire. One newspaper estimated that over 300 angry youths clashed with police and military personnel, (Kamara 24 April 2008). Several youths were said to have wrested arms from police officers, including a handgun and an AK47, (Kamara 24 April 2008). Unrest and panic broke out across the town and businesses closed, (Magistrate [Interview 83]) and

⁸ It seems as though the initial number was between 300 and 500 youths, and that this number expanded greatly, though I was not able to find accurate numbers, some estimated over a thousand, to “thousands”.

shots were allegedly fired into the air, (SLPP Candidate/Community Friendship Org [Interview 53]). A police outpost was allegedly burned to the ground (SLPP Candidate/Community Friendship Org [Interview 53]), houses were vandalized, including the compound of a chief. Live ammunition was fired and generators were stolen, (Gbense Chief [Interview 57]). It took three days for the police and military to quell the riot; “the town was a no-go area,” (Magistrate [Interview 83]). A curfew was imposed.

Five⁹ were charged and had to appear before the court of the Magistrate, including the APC District Youth League Chairman, and the leader and some members of the Central Youths. All were released on bail (Magistrate [Interview 83]), allegedly by a APC candidate running for District Chairman, (Local journalist [Interview 54]). In an unusual move by the youth, a delegation of around fifteen made a trip to Freetown to register a formal apology with the Vice President and the First Lady, also a Kono native, (Central Youths & Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]). The Youth League Chairman, who had been suspended from his position following the attack and interview, was allegedly returned to the position by the Vice President while visiting Kono in the month of June, just a month ahead of the local elections, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

4.2 The youth, and their grievances

I was not able to clarify the exact date or wording of promise to distribute the No.11 tailings, but this aside, the promise it was common knowledge. It had been announced, some say by Koroma, though most mention Sam Sumana, in Koidu’s open air Community Centre on a campaign visit to the District ahead of the 2007 elections. It had been part of a larger promise to end the historical neglect of development in Kono District, which had continued, despite promises to the contrary, under the post-war SLPP government of Tejan Kabbah, (APC Party [webpage]). The high hopes of APC’s ability to deliver were linked in no small part to the position of their native “son of the soil,” Sumana, as Vice President. Many youth made an explicit connection between the election of the VP in the subsequent local elections, and the eventual release of the sand:

The original promise during the campaign was that if the youths of Kono vote for the APC party and put them in power and Sam Sumana to become the Vice

⁹ There is a discrepancy here, where a newspaper article (Kamara 2008) put this number to 30 people charged, while the Magistrate (from the Court for Kono District) quoted five. I was not able to verify.

President, he will use his power to release the sand for the youths, create job facilities etc. (No.11 Leader [Interview 102]).

When asked what had been the proximate causes of the attack on the *sansan*, participants almost without exception brought up the same trigger - the provocative interview broadcast over the local radio by Honourable Tamba E. Kaingbanja.

We were promised to be given the sand if we vote for Sam Sumana to become Vice President. While they did not fulfill their promise, they made a member of the opposition party Honourable T.E. Kaingbanja went to the air and provoked us, use insult languages. [Quoting the MP:] 'No job to take care of our families and after the elections they abandoned us.' So as such we decide to create job for ourselves or find means for our livelihood.[...] We never had a plan to attack the sand but it was only because of the provocative language we heard from the radio by T.E. Kaingbanja, one of the SLPP Honourables, (No.11 Leader [Interview 102]).

That honourable come here over the radio and use provocative statement about the youth and the sand. He day that the VP had promised us the sand. Now he have won the election [the VP], ...he don't give us the sand. They [SLPP] are the people who sold the sand to Kariba. This make us a wealth of angry. That make us to mobilize the youth....(Gunpoint Youth/No.11 [Interview 97]).

1: The former honourable that won in this constitution [constituency], that defeated the VP...T.E. Kaingbanja. So because of that, [he] said this: APC government had lied to us. He came with his campaign and said...VP is lying...[breaking his] promise to give us the sansan.

2: which cannot happen...a lot of propaganda against the VP,
(Central Youths & Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]).

Somewhat surprisingly, they did not express anger with the APC for its inaction (the youth were not aware that the promise was invalid at the time of the attack). Partly this may be because of the party was still in the honeymoon period of its first year in office, but partly it also because of the timing of the research which was during and around the time of the local election, as is explained further below.

In any event, the statements by the youth made plain that their motivations were profoundly linked to grievances against the SLPP party. Among the youth I spoke with, SLPP was perceived as having betrayed its promise of local development in favour of self-interest and greed, in collusion with the chieftdom and the foreign mining companies. The statement therefore stirred up deep-seated resentment towards the party among participating youth. Many said it had been ironic that the party which had initially sold the land, against the in-

terests of the local people, was now cynically gaining political mileage from the APC's "fake promise" to the youth. It was as much the hypocrisy of the context, the youth claimed had galvanized them into action, as it was the prospect that they might not get the sand, or the unthinkable - that APC might turn out to be another disappointment - a risk they could not afford to take. The SLPP government has been blamed by many for sidelining the community, to allow unsafe and exploitative mining practices. Certain chiefs have been regarded by some youth as beneficiaries of this exploitative system who sold out their communities:

They [the chiefs] were with SLPP, the government of the day. They politicized the whole sand system, (APC Candidate [Interview 46]).

Youth grievances revealed themselves partly in narratives of the hegemony of foreign run corporations, whose profiteering interests were at odds with the needs of the community. Many youth felt the company was operating under "selfish interests". The No.11 attack had been part of a flurry of defiant acts against mining companies no behalf of youth and workers (often including youth) to take place in the period from December 2007 up until the Kariba attack in April 2008. Incidents of confrontation, in the form of strikes, land occupations, demonstrations and mediated negotiations, took place against at least five mining companies,¹⁰ including Kariba Kono (SL) Ltd. The list of grievances ranged from poor working conditions among employed youths, to the failure of companies to provide adequate employment or neglect of land with community interests. They also complained about the failure to honour commitments to contribute towards local development and pointed to the more damaging consequences of mining operations, such as environmental degradation, to harmful effects of blasting on property owners, and flawed resettlement schemes.

But, in the context of local elections perhaps, corporate actors, while vilified, were not always accorded the same level of blame as were the national politicians and local authorities who had profited from these sales. For many, their grievances were rooted in the sale of one of few remaining diamond-rich sites to a company that now prohibited their access. Several youth had explained how they themselves had once mined the No.11 tailings. At first they had done so openly, during the NPRC military regime, and then illegally under

¹⁰ In chronological order: Koidu Holdings Ltd. in Tankoro Chiefdom, AV Charge in Nimiyama Chiefdom, Mile Stone in Sandor Chiefdom, Swanfield Mining Company in Niminkoro Chiefdom, Kariba Kono Ltd. In Gbense.

SLPP, bribing security guards on the night shift. But this system had come to a stop after the sand had been sold to Kariba, and security was tightened. The post-war government had, in their view, impoverished their situation even more than it had been during the war:

1: NPRC allow free mining for the citizens of Sierra Leone. But for SLPP, now they sell the land to different investors where the citizens don't have any rights...one reason why hardship..

2: Therefore those are the people that are embezzling our minerals.

Who?

2: The investors they are giving all the contracts to. [...]

3: Life in days of NPRC was better compared to past SLPP government because in days of NPRC there was freedom of peaceful assembly and association and also encouraged the youth man that is not working. Can go anywhere...[mining]. Open place...if you get diamond, can sell it for yourself. 1: [...] Now they sell all the land to investors. Can't go work, they will arrest you. The white people.

3: Even a black man [will arrest you]...[SLPP] take productive site and give to investors...Example Kariba sansan...was a waste for people to get free...SLPP sell sansan to a company only to deprive the youth of this country ...because that sansan belong to the youth. It's the ordinary sand which...white people...waste. These diamonds not important to them. Like...education or medical.

2: [SLPP] Fail us in all aspects.

1: Where we go to make our living they take and sell. NPRC never did that.

2:...If you see us now begging, SLPP did that to us.

(Central Youths & Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]).

The taking of the sand was therefore as much a political statement as it was an act of survival. Frustrated by their chronic marginalization, and yet another broken promise, youth took the law into their own hands to force a concession in the name of social justice.

The collective action was also entirely youth-led. As a former leader of the Central Youths recounted:

..After they won we asked them about the sand. They told us to wait, wait, wait, all this time wait. Instead, they started discouraging us from mining. Let's put all our attention [on agriculture]....After that meeting, most of the boys become angry that the promise they make has not been fulfilled. So we called an emergency meeting among ourselves.

Who?

The youth leader, [name]. He alert all the youth that we should go and work there by force. To mine the sand, so we can get something. The police went there but for 2 consecutive days they were unable to remove us from the sand, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

While many could not identify who started the movement, a number pointed to the Leader of the APC Youth League for Kono District as the organizer who had led the youth in an act of defiance against the party, and who had given the BBC interview, (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]).

The youth also used symbolism to make their case politically compelling. The significance of the attack was planted at the top of the sand hill, in the form of a red flag. I asked several youths about its meaning:

To show that this sand belong to the youth. The youth are children of this country, they are supposed to benefit from the land,
(Gunpoint Youth/No.11 [Interview 97]).

Another responded that the red flag represented the unfulfilled promise of the APC, and that erecting it was a pressure tactic to compel the APC party to act:

Red symbolize APC, because they have promise us before, so we think of one strategy we can use [to force them to fulfill their promise],
(Central Youths & Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]).

Kariba site workers who were present during the attack plainly read political messages into the event: “These are the disgruntled youth, political. Politics means separation,” (Kariba workers [Interview 58]). But what could have appeared to be a proxy battle by national parties had implications that ran deeper into the local politics of equitable distribution. Many of the site workers held close connections to the chiefs, and had been among those to support SLPP in the 2007 elections. Three of the four we spoke with had now switched over to supporting APC for the local elections, but still revealed concerns that the youth had been motivated by political score-settling from the previous SLPP era:

Worker 1: As soon as they know you are SLPP you are in trouble.

Worker 4: When they come here...

Worker 1: They came with a red flag. They went and put o top of the sand. Saying the sand is belonging to APC youth.

Worker 4: They term us as SLPP because during time of SLPP all the chiefs were SLPP. So as soon as saw us, said these people were recommended [by] the chiefs. So all SLPP. Some here not recommended by chiefs but by chiefdom authorities. Because this recommendation was open to all authorities.

Could you explain?

Worker 4: The Paramount Chief and Chiefdom speaker ask every section chief to recommend few people. This was done,
(Kariba workers [Interview 58]).

What the fourth worker was indicating about favouritism in the hiring practices of the company appeared to be the case. Of about thirty workers on the site, Sia was able to identify family connections to chiefs in several cases, in addition to several of the above and other workers who readily admitted to receiving recommendations for their jobs. Unsurprisingly, part of the local dimension of this grievance was therefore the exclusion of youth from these sought-after employment prospects with the companies, which they viewed as being reserved for the well-connected. One youth who did not participate in the No.11 attack, but who ran for Local Councilor explained that he had at one point worked for the company before it had fully started up operations, as part of a small crew of 10 other youth, but had not been paid for nine of the months he had worked there. He had taken his case to the elders and quit his job after receiving no help, but observed that later, after the company had started up operations again, these chiefs had brought in “their own brothers” to work there, (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]). Similarly, another who had participated in No.11, and who had worked for a short time with the company, explained that, while he had received pay for the first month of work, certain chiefs had intervened and pressured him and others to leave:

The chiefs said not to work there...they want their brothers to work there. When the chiefs heard we got one month pay, the chiefs intervened immediately - that the money was too much. So telling ‘the house of the chiefs are not yet filled, so cannot expect the house of others to be filled.’ That was Chief [name], (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

The local and national political grievances relating to exclusion from patronage networks and decision-making processes about local resources were strong motivating factors. However, these appeared to be secondary to the immediate opportunity presented for survival:

Was No.11 done by APC youths?

No.11 was mixed. Everyone wanted to work. That’s why not political, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

The principal commonality among the Kono youth who joined the attack was their unemployed status, including occasional miners. The membership of most of the central Koidu political youth groups was also in attendance, though they participated in their personal capacity rather than as groups. Discourses of basic survival were strongly attached to reasons for participating in the attack, as explained by this 18 year old miner:

Why did you go to No.11?

Just somewhere to attach ourselves for survival. Because stealing – if youth man steal in this town they beat him mercilessly, (Central Youths/No.11 [Interview 78]).

Many of the youth I had spoken to were miners without sponsors. This meant their mining work, particularly during the rainy season, was extremely irregular, as they relied on filling in vacant spots where minors didn't show up for work. In contrast, most of the youth I spoke with who were not involved in the No.11 attack gave as their reason that they were busy doing a job, including sponsored miners. In addition, several also stated that they did not believe in, or feared the repercussions of taking the law into their own hands, (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]; Konos Park Youth Chair [Interview 61]).

I had only begun to scratch the surface of the social ramifications of their situation. The humiliating effect of this poverty was made strikingly clear during one interview I held with three young men about the No.11, when one of them commented on my purchasing of some drinks, to fuel us through the long interview:

2: In NPRC days. It was free! [diamonds]

1: By this time, when you come here, we offer *you* drink, we give you small diamond. Very pity, very shameful for us to come and you buy drinks for us. [emphasis added], (Central Youths & Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]).

The “social moratorium” in which these youth were suspended was also evident from the unsympathetic regard in which they were held by some members of the community. Discourses of youth idleness frequently followed talk of the political youth, fueled by the assumption that ex-combatants, having been able during the war to take what they wanted for free, were not socialized into working for their pay. One of the chiefs in the area (himself not held in high regard by the youth) had this to say of the youth behind No.11, whom he did not distinguish from those involved in the elections business:

[They] don't go to school, don't learn a trade, want to live fine. A lot of jobs [are available, being paid] 6-7000 leones a day to reclaim [mines]...they don't do it.

Why?

Feel to live idly and live fine. That's why they are so troublesome at elections. Because want money. They come to me, 'Chief I will help you...' After elections – no more violence, (Gbense Chief [Interview 57]).

4.3 Deliberate law-breaking

Those who joined in the attack of the No.11 had different levels of awareness about what they were doing. Some had heard first hand the promise by the APC party to release the sand to the youth, and had been among those directly provoked by T.E. Kainbanja's interview. Others had heard only rumours of a promise. Others joined in the bonanza with no advance warning or knowledge of any plan, but simply to try to 'make hay while the sun was shining'. Over a thousand youth were estimated to have descended on the sand, coming from other chiefdoms and even crossing the border from Guinea. It is unlikely that all of them realized that by doing so, they were taking the law into their own hands. But among those living in Koidu city with whom I spoke with, this much was clear, both from their words and actions, (No.11 Group Leader [Interview 102]).

People sometimes referred to 'the attack' or 'the strike' on the sand, or alternatively 'when the youth "took" or "stormed" the sand.' Though combined with the violence that later broke out in Koidu town, the images evoked are somewhat chaotic. But there was clearly a level of organization involved. While many youth joined the activity in what they believed to be a spontaneous and opportunistic mobilisation of youth; others spoke of a planned act. One youth mentioned even a rudimentary plan that assigned a division of labour among the youths for once the sand was captured:

Were you at No.11?

Ya, because everybody was there. [I was there] to guide as a security.

What do you mean?

Because the place was not open, so we were ready to set up a team if the place is free - who will be security, who will be miners...(Balance Youth/No.11 [Interview 74]).

On the whole it appeared that the decision to take the sand was a calculated one, at least by the youth leaders, who had weighed up the options of breaking the law against their likelihood of freeing the sand.

The attack was no frenzy of gratuitous violence, but began as a relatively controlled exercise that began to degenerate with the confrontation with police. But these acts of violence which followed, the attempt to burn the police station, the overpowering of a police officer for a gun, the vandalism and violence against residents and shop-owners, were de-

scribed by some as the work of opportunistic and undisciplined individuals, rather than reflecting the behaviour of the majority.

...Pai Eye - he was once a soldier in the war and dismissed after the war because of behaviour. He has nothing to do anymore, so decided to go and wait for opportunities like this, (Community Friendship Organisation Chairman [Interview 41]).

So people closed their business, they started attacking people - ordinary citizens. Just to create trouble, (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]).

Following the bloody confrontation between protestors and police at Koidu Holdings, less than five months prior, it was perhaps not surprising that some youth reacted with violence. But, as the ex-combatant who had taken the gun from the police officer explained, far from being random or purely reactionary, for some youth violence itself became an act of justice, to redress the broken promise made to the youth:

I'm a commanding chief, we need our troops. To lead our troops. When I lead the troops we have a promise I hold. During past campaign in the Presidential election, they told the youth when we vote for them they are going to distribute the sand to the youth. When we went, we saw so many police with rifle and shot [rubber bullets] against us. Some of us were ex-combatants, so we take revenge on them. I'm in the jungle at that time, I told them [the youth] let us stand. Every human life leave there a sacrifice of Kono youths, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 47]).

The same conversation revealed discourses of retribution and revenge, targeting those in positions of power and authority:

What was the plan?

Our honourable councilors, elders, our chairman, all of them – capture and take to police station. They open fire against us; we open fire against them, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 47]).

Others continued to be convinced of the rightness of their actions, even after it became known that the company legally held the user rights to the sand:

Sia: Did you know that most of you break the law?

No, we didn't break the law.

Sia: Why?

Because it belongs to we the youths. It is the waste property of another company. ...the sand is the waste product of SLS/NDMC. The chiefs have closed all the mining around ...We have nowhere to mine and get money and since we are not educated to work in offices, we only depend on the sand as a way of creating job for our livelihood.

Sia: Do you know that the sand belongs to the company?

No, it does not belong to the company. The sand was given to us [the chiefdom] by other company (SLST/NDMC) that were rich enough to do mining for themselves. It is because Kariba has no money that is why they are fighting to get the waste of other companies, or they do not want to respect the social corporate responsibilities with regards to mining (Gunpoint Youths/No.11 [Interview 103]).

To some extent, their strategy had started paying off, as one of the Gbense Chiefs, an “uncle” of the VP, met with the company at the police station to negotiate a compromise, requesting 30 percent of the gravel for the youth, (Kariba Operations Director [Interview 95]). No agreement was reached. But already, rumours had already spread that a deal had been struck with the company to divide the sand, and that individuals could access portions of it for washing through a ticket system:

The company were afraid of their properties if the youth working there. [They] call the Paramount Chief. Youth were alleging the Paramount Chief sold the sand to Kariba, so that’s why don’t want to come to their aid. They should talk to the company and give half the sand [to the youth]. So they did that talk to the company and give half to the youth. So no sooner they did that the youth were jubilating all over, because rumour that No.11 sand released, and divided and give half to the youth, (Gunpoint Youth/No.11 [Interview 98]).

Hardly erratic or uncontrolled, but rather, reflecting the faith that a deal favourable to the youth was being negotiated, the same informant explained the efforts made by the youth to respect company property and equipment:

So they did that. They shared the sand. Said this part is for the youth. Because there’s a gate at Kariba mining. Said no one should enter the gate. Outside this gate, outside the compound where [the youth were accessing the sand] the youth themselves decided they should put measures in place to prevent [people attacking company property]...no youth should enter Kariba compound. After 3 days, if anyone wants to go, should have a ticket. So the youth themselves were putting measures in place to protect their property....Try their level best to secure property of the mining company, (Gunpoint Youth/No.11 [Interview 98]).

This was therefore not an act of chaotic plunder. On the one hand, it was understood by youths involved to be a legitimate act of claiming their rights to employment and development. On the other, the leadership, and a great many of the youth (participant and non-)

were clearly conscious that what they were doing was illegal, but that it was necessary to take action in order to compel the party and from the local authorities to take action. Using all of the resources at their disposal, including flags, sheer numbers, and media appeals, they had for a brief period successfully redefined the public space. They had reframed the argument, drawing uncomfortable connections between chiefs and SLPP, they had shamed and pressured the APC into acting on a promise it had likely realize was not possible to keep. Not least, they had physically commandeered the space they had been prevented from accessing, and many had even started finding diamonds, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]). They had experienced a fleeting moment of strategic agency.

4.4 Turning point

The act was intended to influence rather than to defeat government. Unilaterally trespassing and taking the gravel was only possible in the short term, and required winning government support. To the extent that they needed government support, and that they feared the return to war, leaders had no intention of taking on law enforcement agencies, although some elements resisted.

After it became clear that negotiation was not an option, the police and military were called to the site to put a stop to the illegal action. They used tear gas to disperse the youth. Forty youth leaders were brought to the police station, and thirty¹¹ were charged with inciting the attack, and for suspected possession of an AK47, (Kamara 7 May 2008). They where they were asked to talk down their followers from the violence that was spreading through the town. Command structures still in place from the war appeared, among some youth, to be utilized to mobilize and demobilize the youth, though this was not explicitly referred to. One of the arrested youth leaders, a locally notorious ex-combatant, referred to as an “APC Youth Leader” in the Concord Times¹², explained:

Police invite me to the station...We are the elders of the youths. When I talked to them [the other youth], they stopped to be violent, (Central Youth /No.11 Leader [Interview 30]).

¹¹ Or five, according to the Kono District Magistrate.

¹² Though referred to as the APC Youth Leader, he was in fact the leader of the Central Youths. The actual APC District Youth League Chairman who had conducted the BBC interview was not mentioned in this particular article, (Kamara 7 May 2008).

Some youth expressed limits on their willingness to pursue the sand at all costs:

We wanted to go and fight and burn the police station to release our friends and continue to fight for our rights. But we only think that we were just from war, and we know the consequences of war. So we don't want to go into any other war again, and this makes us calm down, (No.11 Group Leader [Interview 102]).

In the end, the youth were constrained by a lack of exit options, due to the strength of law enforcement and the unwillingness of most of their number to risk a return to war. At most, this explains perhaps a reluctant end to the struggle. What it does not explain is the inconsistency in discourse and behaviour that followed the attack. Within two months, youth shifted from attempting to pressure the APC party through open confrontation, to embracing it and becoming apologists for the VP, who had owned a share of their anger during the strike, and bore significant responsibility for having made the original untenable promise.¹³

Connections smacking of political opportunism by party elites surfaced after the event, starting with the release on bail of the arrested youth by the APC candidate for District Council. Given the timing of these events - less than three months before the date of the local elections - and the significance of the elections to the VP, and of the results in Kono District in particular, it seems a safe assumption that subsequent actions of the youth were influenced by the strategic objectives of those seeking power. The formal apology by the youth, to the VP and First lady, was a dramatic u-turn from their original confrontational stance. The fact that an entire delegation of about fifteen or so of these youth - not just those in the APC leadership - then travelled to Freetown to seek their forgiveness, reveals a fear on the part of the youth of having their bridges burned with these powerful patrons. One youth who joined the delegation described the tone of the visit:

2:...when VP heard that, straight away [he] asked police to stop the work because not permitted...So it stop and later [we] make a delegation and meet in Freetown...So explain this system we are facing...SLPP government talk bad against him! We go there! Because it was hard for us!

3: Yes.

1: So VP said you do a very bad thing, so we apologize. Take some time for him to accept apology.

Who apologised?

¹³ Kariba's Director of operations stated that the "blame clearly lies with the VP," and that the VP had apparently come under fire within his party, both for this and for bailing out the arrested youth, (Kariba Operations Director [Interview 95]).

1: We the youth that go to Freetown...15 of us... [names, including Chairman and Chairlady of APC Youth League]

Whom did you speak with?

1: VP and First Lady. Just apologize because they say we have done a thing they are not expecting. He say, let's still wait, after the Local Council Election, he will know what to do. Let us patient,
(Central Youths/Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]).

The dramatic reversal of the “youth line” towards the APC demonstrated by the official apology to the Vice President and First Lady is a puzzling contradiction. Logically, the anger of the youth would have been directed towards those who, at best, had incompetently made a promise they couldn't fulfill, or at worst, cynically made an empty promise to mobilize youth support. However, in quite an opposite reaction, the attitudes of the No.11 youth towards the role of the APC and the VP in particular bordered on apologetic and reverent in the weeks around the local elections. Their forgiving attitude towards the new APC regime had an equal measure of hostile anti-SLPP rhetoric, which often resurfaced in connection with the provocative statement by the SLPP honourable for Kono. Several youth referred to propaganda and insults against the VP, who was, in their opinion, being unfairly attacked by the SLPP party. As illustrated in the statement below, the VP was extremely popular among the youth by the time I was collecting data, around the period of the local elections:

You are not angry with the VP?

Not the VP. We don't have any problem with the VP.

Whom are you angry with?

The people who sold the sand and started to provoke us again [SLPP].

[Chief named]?

He is one of the chief that sold the sand.

Did they consult the youth?

No consult the youth.

Did the VP make a promise?

No, the VP don't make a promise, because of that sand. Don't make that promise all this time. Because they [SLPP] have lost the election, that's why they want a strategy to incite the youth. They are the people who want to cause problem among the youth, (Gunpoint Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 97]).

The completely uncritical tone the No.11 youth adopted with regard to the VP undermines the perception that they retained any of independence that they may have had when they launched the strike on the sand. In the next section, I explain how the reversal of their be-

haviour is explained by the hope of new promises, tied to the local election. All that was needed was to support the VP's party, and patience.

4.5 Explaining the turnaround - new promises

If the No.11 strike revealed a subversive strategic agency on the part of youth, by the time of the local elections, their agency had been aligned completely with that of the APC party, to an even greater degree than during the 2007 General Election, the outcome of which had been more uncertain. The local elections followed less than two and a half months after the attack on *the sansan*. By this point all arrested youths had been released on bail by politicians and they had entered into the political campaigning, mostly for APC. A newcomer in the city who had not known about No.11 would have seen little to indicate that the relationship between the youth and the APC had recently been strained. In the couple weeks before the 6 July 2008 Local Elections took place, it was already clear which party was likely to dominate within the city, and even the district. Only APC posters were visible around the city. The only SLPP and symbols that had not been torn down were ones on the inside of shops that could be locked up and ones on the T-shirts of a few bold candidates. For a district which had, since the war, supported SLPP and which had remained an SLPP stronghold during the recent General Election, while the majority of the country underwent a political sea change in favour of the APC, the visibility of APC youth in the streets in the weeks leading up to 5 July 2008 sporting party T-shirt, kerchiefs and colours, was evidence that this sea change had now come to Kono. Other party supporters, notably SLPP supporters, tended to stay below the radar.

Now that the VP had returned the position back to the Chairman, the APC Youth League was able to play a significant role in mobilizing the youth. The Chairman referred to his direct line with the VP on several occasions, and helped to clarify why the VP had regained such strong support among the youth in the district:

I spoke with the VP Sam Sumana on several occasions. Jobs are coming.

Do you believe that?

Yes, of course. I believe in my leadership.

What sector are the jobs coming in?

Road construction...he told me to prepare 1000 youths to engage in jobs.

Have you recruited?

They are on standby...A youth organization under my umbrella. Under the District Youth League, linked to the APC party. So [we will] consider them first before others, (APC Youth League Chairman/No.11 [Interview 16]).

My interest in the “political youth” groups had been sparked by this admission that not only was the party planning job creation, but also job distribution. As I began to meet with some of the groups he had listed in the coming weeks, what emerged was that most were small community youth groups who did mainly monthly street cleaning, where they would set up roadblocks and tax passing traffic. Some also raised funds by organizing shows and all had a system of self-taxation through monthly membership fees. Many also had small plots of land where they grew food for their own consumption, and for several in the city centre, office space consisted of burned out houses where some members also lived. Few were registered or had maintained their annual registration with the Ministries of Social Welfare or of Youth and Sports, and many were dismissed by formal CSOs as transient “political youth” - groups that had sprung up around the elections and that would disintegrate just as quickly afterwards. But among the youth, some of these were well known, in particular, the Central Youth Development Organization (commonly “Central Youths”) which had members who recalled its early beginnings under the NPRC regime with a role in community defense and cleaning, (Central Youths/Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 99]). Many youth, when asked who were the youth leaders in their areas, would name the leaders of their own organization, and some knew of no others.

I had spent more time talking with the Central Youths, as well as the Gunpoint Youth, and the No.9 Youth Farmers though I had also talked with the leaders of the Balance Youth, the Community Friendship Organisation (also known as Bhagdad), Tankoro Youth Organization and Konos Park Youth, initially selecting groups because of their inclusion among those listed off by the APC Youth Chairman for the District. Of these, the ones in the city centre (Central, Balance, Gunpoint) in particular had a membership that had participated in No.11, and to a greater or lesser extent, took part in campaigning for the local election. Only Bhagdad, was openly political, supporting SLPP, with other groups claiming political neutrality. Some were legitimate CSOs, but others were considered “political youth” or “political groups” that had been set up for the elections.

Of those youth who crossed over from No.11 to campaigning for APC, I found most were officially unemployed, finding work in seasonal mining, and through their community groups, small scale agriculture. Referring to the twenty odd people who had gathered to take part in the discussion, the Central Youth members described their status in this way:

All here are without a job. Some of us are ex-service. I'm a retired soldier but have not benefited any useful, (Central Youths [Interview 31]).

I cannot speak as to the range of income generating activities that the No.11 vigilante miners were involved in, but among the campaigners in general, there were also traders, bike riders, motorcycle fitters and other informal sector workers.

In addition to local opinion that some were political campaign groups, there was also the evidence, among several of these groups, in the form of the prolific APC party branding on posters and most T-shirts present (with no other party logos). It was therefore surprising when the members vociferously objected to being linked (as a group) to any sort of political campaigning activities. Members presented themselves as legitimate community development organizations, with membership figures, activities, plans for project proposals, and in one case, their own constitution. The message was unequivocal that they honoured the individual rights of members to support the party of their choosing. By way of explanation, repeatedly organizations offered that they supported "*the government of the day*".

4.6 The VP's impartial supporters

The 2008 Local Council Elections in Kono revealed the continued importance of political fence-sitting, but not through mercurial shape shifting between parties. With the outcome fairly certain, and fewer benefits on offer at rallies than during the general elections, there was no benefit to be gained from practicing watermelon politics. Most youth made a decisive switch to the APC party, pinning their hopes on the promises the party was now emphasizing - electricity, better roads and agricultural development. APC supporters ruled the streets of Koidu. The one exception to their bold support seemed to take place when they were gathered in community groups and were confronted by my curiosity about their political affiliations. The normal response was that they supported "the government of the day."

In contrast to more established and legitimate (and occasionally funded) youth CSOs, discourse on support for the *government of the day* was common among the “political” youth groups. This statement normally preceded an explanation of the group’s non-partisan status. It was generally asserted that there was no conflict of interest in supporting *the government of the day*, and being a neutral youth organization. In practice, this meant that groups did nothing to discourage their members from wearing party symbols (normally or the ruling party) or taking part in rallies.

It revealed a tactical fluidity of partisan affiliation that facilitated their access to benefits that was couched in terms of loyalty to the government. It proclaimed loyalty to the government (rather than to a specific party), while masking a tactical fluidity of partisan affiliation which facilitated their access to benefits. These benefits were both tangible and anchored in the present, in the form of small donations from campaigners, and future-based, in the promise of jobs and project funding. This principle had also applied during the 2007 General Elections, during which impartiality had translated into accepting tokens from running candidates without discriminating between donating parties.¹⁴ Use of the term therefore did not signify ideological motivation or loyalty to a party, but denoted, rather, transient support of incumbent power holders. It implied that loyalty was attached to a given office, rather than to the occupying party, and that support would end when elected officials ceased to occupy the seat of power.

To many of these groups, the phrase itself was a sufficient and logical explanation of their apparent partisanship. This much is evident from the following extract of a conversation I had with a former street girl turned petty trader in perfumes, and who was now the chairlady of one of the community youth groups in the town centre that had been actively involved in campaigning for APC:

Why [does your group support]APC?

Because government of the day.

Before APC, did you support SLPP?

We were also supporting SLPP because government of the day at that time.

Why good for support government of the day?

Because have all power in their hands and oversee everybody... The reason our group is called “Balance” [is that we have a balance of political supporters] some APC, some SLPP and some PMDC. All come back to APC

¹⁴ One trade association, which had benefited from cement and roofing tiles for its office, had justified the contributions on the basis that they had come from different parties, and that it was in fact being neutral.

though because government of the day, (Balance Youths Chairlady [Interview 44]).

The response contains a degree of ambiguity, in that it suggests that members may in fact hold varying allegiances, but at the same time, that all “come back to” the government of the day. It is taken to illustrate the fluidity of political allegiance, which for a majority of youth is based on the likelihood of a party winning. And in the context of Local Elections, this outcome was pre-determined by the APC’s incumbency.

Similarly, among the Central Youth, who denied partisanship, a discussion with members revealed similar reasoning:

1: We believe we are with the government of the day. Youth are not politicians, but we do play a role in politics, in terms of development...agriculture... Local election time is important. Means power for the people – grassroots. When you make a decision for yourself. Need to vote for someone...with easy access...who know our needs. They are the ones who will talk [to] the central government.

Does APC know your needs?

2: Government of the day! They know our needs, (Central Youths [Interview 31]).

The response exemplifies how many of these youth saw themselves very much as implementors (e.g. “tacticians”) of decisions already taken by politicians (e.g. “strategists”). The dependent position of youth also comes across with the reference to the need for “someone with easy access.” This statement captures the assumption that a local government member representing the same party as the ruling government will have easier access in decision making and resource distribution. The name at the end of the long political chain of access was normally that of the Vice President, Sam Sumana:

2: In the past we had youth of Solo B [Solomon Berewa]. Now we have the youth of Sam Sumana. ...Most of their [youth] leaders were SLPP.

3: So after election everybody, all the youth man, they belong to present APC.

1: So everybody must come under the present government.

2: Everyone who want to be a youth must...[come under the] government of the day.

Why is it important to support the government of the day?

2: Because government of the day they facilitate them,
(Central Youths/Balance Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 97]).

Significantly, support for *the government of the day* was at the same time seen as both a political manoeuvre, and a claim of neutrality. Community youth groups navigating the temporal landscape of politics and civil society often engaged in contradictory behaviour – showing all the signs of political campaign groups while simultaneously claiming legitimacy through their alleged impartiality and engagement in community development activities. In this context, shape shifting became a matter of shifting from political to apolitical group identities.

Visiting the meeting place of the Central Youth, a youth group that counted itself as one of the most active in the District, such contradictions were glaring. They gathered, in fluctuating numbers, in the roofless burned out houses in the centre of the town. In the period leading up to the Local Election many of the members wore APC party T-shirts, and APC posters were mounted onto otherwise bare concrete walls. The group discussed its support of the *government of the day*, and its involvement in monthly street cleaning exercises and small-scale agriculture and poultry farming, and its plans for submitting project proposals after the elections, (Central Youths [Interview 31]).

But when asked whether it was political, members adamantly insisted that they were non-political – they were a youth development organisation. But other members of the community - officials, civil society organizations, and private citizens alike - tended to associate the names of these groups with negative politics, referring to them as “political youth”, “campaign groups” and even “bad boys”. Reference to *the government of the day* therefore conceivably enabled such youth groups to rationalize their support for political candidates while simultaneously projecting the status of a (once) registered youth group and legitimate member of civil society eligible to receive aid. Politics was only a transient phase which came with its opportunities, and then passed:

Everybody is belonging to a party. When election come, everybody go to his party til after election, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

As if to confirm the transient nature of their political engagement, when I returned to visit their meeting place after the election for four days in a row, it was deserted of all of its previous activity. Only late in the evening, at the end of the work week, did the small rooms begin to fill up as youth came buy and smoke marijuana.

4.6.2 Understanding “the government of the day”

The government of the day is not an expression that was invented by these youth groups, but one that originated in the division of powers between the institution of the chieftaincy and the central government. According to the Ministry of Local Government, chiefs owe their commitment to whichever party is in power, even though in practice “chiefs are rarely so apolitical”, (Jackson 2006, 101). Taken at face value, by evoking the discourse on the *government of the day* youth groups were demonstrating their subscription to principles of political neutrality and legitimacy, and by extension, were acknowledging the taboo of being politicized. But at the heart of it, the discourse of *the government of the day* reveals a concern for access to patronage that is shared by chiefs and youth alike. In practice, during elections, politicians rely on chiefs to mobilize grassroots support. Chiefs, in return rely on their patrons in the central government for a source of income to fuel their own local patronage networks, (Jackson 2006, 101.) As one chief I spoke with put it:

The Paramount Chief is not supposed to be neutral but [to support]
AGIP: Any Government In Power.[...]

I don't understand, what happens during periods of political transition?
People keep changing like chameleons. My chieftom, I want good roads, schools...Who is going to provide?[...]To be very honest, if you are not with the government, they will not [support] you. So for 5 years people are going to [get] punished. You have to [support] that government. Not for your own selfish interests, because your people will suffer.[...]I have my own reasons for supporting APC, (Paramount Chief [Interview 49]).

The principle of supporting AGIP, and the question of whether this means refraining from all political involvement or using one's position of power to campaign, is therefore, in practice, open to interpretation. This grey area is exploited by chiefs. During the local elections, with the APC party in power at the central level, it was possible for chiefs who supported local APC candidates to engage in behind-the-scenes campaigning while in fact supporting the government of the day. It is widely believed that chiefs continue to use their leverage with the local population to mobilize support, even if not all incidents are reported.¹⁵

For the youth groups who felt compelled to justify the prominence of APC party symbols in their ostensibly neutral spaces as well as the small but significant benefits de-

¹⁵ In two interviews young SLPP candidates recounted being pressured by chiefs to step down.

rived from politics,¹⁶ reference to *the government of the day* enabled them to exploit this same grey area. The implication could be that it was acceptable to support the APC party for the local elections, because this was in fact the party in power at the national level. Couching their practice in such terms enabled these groups to pursue political patronage while the claiming neutrality of a legitimate civil society organization, eligible for registration and funding.

But the comparison between chiefs and youth ends there. Paramount chiefs are in a relationship of mutual dependence with political party elites, and can leverage their power accordingly, in a strategic manner. In contrast, I observed that the youth who are the campaign foot-soldiers, were in a far greater position of dependency, hanging on the hope of electoral promises. In the context of the failed attack on the No.11 site, and the subsequent official apology to the chief patron of the district, their loyal discourse on *the government of the day* can be understood as reaffirming their position of dependency. Many of these same groups tried to cash in the promises of the government of the day, by making official requests for jobs and support to agricultural development.¹⁷

Therefore, on its own, the lack of attachment to any particular party inherent in supporting *the government of the day* seems to grant youth groups a level of independence from the political game, in a similar way to the above-noted electoral behaviour of youth in the 2007 General Election. But placed in the context of the story of No.11, during which youth voiced their anger with the ruling government for reneging on its promise to release to them the valuable sand, the incongruent discourse on *the government of the day* speaks, rather, to the strength of patrimonial relations and the sway that such relations continue to exert over the political behaviour of youth.

4.7 *The practice of supporting the government of the day*

Discourse on the government of the day corresponded with the internal dynamics of some of these groups, which went through their own internal power struggles in the period ahead of elections in order to align their internal leadership with the ruling party. I had spo-

¹⁶ During the General Election, benefits were larger, including bags of cement and zinc roofing panels for one large association from 2 different parties; during the local elections groups still received contributions from campaigners as well as food during rallies.

¹⁷ Many of these groups also lacked the capacity to make project proposals, but all discussed plans to deliver their proposals to the newly elected local councillors after the elections were over.

ken with three youth leaders who had experienced such internal revolts against their leadership, and a fourth whom I suspect experienced similar forces in the call for his resignation. Others had also apparently faced similar pressures to resign. In these cases, the old leadership was branded as SLPP-supporting, although only in one case did the leader in question actually have a fixed affiliation with SLPP, the others had also subsequently converted to APC. Such transitions therefore tended to appear more personally opportunistic for challengers than strategic for the group as a whole. The role of political patrons was apparent in at least one of these cases, as explained below.

In the clearest example, this change of leadership was simultaneously demanded from below and encouraged from above. The former chairman of the Central Youth told this story. He had been an SLPP supporter, and had been chairman of the youth group for three years, and his group had, he said, benefited from patronage from the then VP, Solomon Berewa. I had later spoken with a Ministry of Youth and Sports Official who had recalled working with him and the group, by providing recommendations for the group to use fields for football matches, and to rent halls to hold fund-raising shows (discos). He explained that during the time of his chairmanship, the group had not been actively political:

That time we were not political. That's why I resigned. Because the youth have become more political. Since just after the election. Presently, APC-SLPP youth fighting each other. Before I was working with the group there were different political parties in my group. And the boys were cooperating with me. When any one get a problem with the police, I go there and do my best. I was able to control them. Just after the election, some of these APC youth come in. ...They accuse me of being SLPP youth chairman, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 60]).

Just after the General Election, there was an influx of new members into the organisation, all supporting the APC party, pushing membership up, he estimated, from around 80 to over 100 members. They sacked him, and elected a new chairman, a current member. With echoes of what would happen during No.11, a delegation had then gone to Freetown to the Vice President to present the new leader. According to this ousted leader, internal alignments had happened with other community youth organisations during the same interim-election period.

The new leader who replaced him was the same notorious ex-combatant who had been among those arrested during No.11. Some speculated that this appointment was a po-

litical reward for his loyalty to the APC party, (Central Youth [Interview 92]) which included a stint as the personal body personal bodyguard to the Vice President, and prior to that providing security for a Mayoral candidate when APC was not popular. Among the members of the organisation, he was the only youth leader they recognised. By outsiders, he was often referred to as a rebel, or as a killer or drug addict and several informants recalled an incident some months back when this leader had stabbed someone at the Opera Junction in the centre of the town, with speculation that it related to money. I had asked him early on why he had run for chairman, and he responded that the initiative had not been his own:

I don't decide, the youth decide. They find out I am fit and capable to be leader. ...Appointed me. They make me to go to Community Centre Hall with elders there and all the youth... The youth and the elders decided together, (Central Youth Chair/No.11 [Interview 30]).

The supportive role of political patrons was raised again another conversation with a group member who was an SLPP supporter:

The VP change leader of Central Youths, so he change all the leaders. All the strong organisations in Kono he change all the leaders.

Which?

Even the Driver's Union...the Diamond Dealer's Association, the leader was changed. VP tell them [the youth group members] since [endorsed group leader] is for APC he started campaigning [endorsed group leader]. Because I am the government of the day, so if you want development, give support to [endorsed group leader].

Did the VP come to the Central Youths election?

No he...[said] If you vote for [endorsed group leader] you are still supporting the APC party. In terms of development it can help.

Who said this speech?

The Diamond Dealer's chairman. He's the one that make the speech.

When?

Immediately after the [2007 general] election, (Central Youth [Interview 92]).

Clearly this example was part of a larger pattern of political realignment involving the sponsorship of specific candidates by political patrons. Confirming this trend, a key informant explained his expectation that groups that had not already done so would realign themselves again after the Local Election had confirmed the turnover towards APC:

Now it is Ernest Bai Koroma, a new leader, a new party APC, so you are expecting youth groups to call another election. Youth groups with us in SLPP regime, now APC regime...

How often are there elections?

Most times happen alongside General Election. After every Local Council Election the youth groups do another election for themselves. There must be a councilor that is representing the youths on the council, so he might call up an election for all registered youth groups.

Where does the initiative for youth group elections come from?

...Councillor may call or [youth may initiate], (Hill Station/Central Youth [Interview 73]).

Regardless of the level of formality of these elections, the essential point is that it is not an unusual practice for youth to align their groups with the politics of patrons, in this case, the Vice President. One youth leader put it more bluntly:

The most active youth group in Kono District must be part of politicians. All the other youth groups are dormant. In days of SLPP, talk 'Bhagdad, Bhagdad...' [his organisation] Now APC and [everyone talks about] Central Youths, (Community Friendship Organisation Chair [Interview 41]).

The manifestations of government support were not always positive. Levels of electoral intimidation and violence were considered relatively low during the local election, (UN News Service 2008). With a strong non-violence movement as the backdrop, electoral violence was highly stigmatized. Nonetheless, in addition to one open incident of violence on the SLPP rally day, there were numerous such reports of intimidation and targeted acts of violence in the media and with the police of intimidation, particularly against candidates and supporters of SLPP and independents, (Massaquoi 2008). The belief that a chain of command connected chiefs, politicians, including the VP himself, to political youths was common. Two of the young candidates I spoke with reported that they had experienced pressure, threats and intimidation to step down, including by one of the Gbense chiefs. One also recounted receiving a death threat from the leader of one of the political youth groups:

I was called by the chiefs and VP to step down. He [the VP] called me through the chiefs.

Which chief?

Chief [name]. He called me, but I refused to went there. [He went on to explain how he'd also received threats from his fellow youths:] 'If you don't step down, we will cut your head.' In fact, [youth group leader] is one of these guys. Said it on three occasions. ... All are [from the same youth group], but [the leader] is the only ex-combatant.... They say I should step down in the interest of the VP, because the VP is from Kono. I reported to the police. They told me they would abuse my mother. If I didn't step down, they will see me as an enemy to the VP. I said this is democracy and

I have my civic right. No amount of intimidation will stop me. I am the only candidate who used to come to the central area every day. Others are afraid... (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]).

The youth administering these threats had adopted the VP's victory as their own personal objective, and were committed to bringing about this end, through violence if necessary. Ironically, at least one of these youth had also participated as a speaker in a public peace rally alongside politicians that I had had the chance to attend. In such incidents, it was clear that youth were not the instigators, as was explained to this candidate by his former tormentor:

Yesterday [the same youth group leader] met me. He started apologising to me, let me forget about it. The election is over now. He was just doing that, he was sent by their leaders.

What leader?

[Name], [APC] aspirant for District Council Chairperson, (SLPP Candidate/CFO [Interview 53]).

The same politician, whom the youth alleged had stood the assurity for their release on bail after the No.11 attack, was also the one named in connection with this incident.

On the side of the opposition, the youth organisation with strong SLPP leadership spoke of its own role in "defending" party rally days from the encroachment of the dominant APC:

Sometimes they will say SLPP date 25th for rally and will see other party wants to intervene. The youth will take part to defend the party at that time. Because usually give a calendar date for every political party. Party will give bad boys... youth drugs that is the time when we will defend SLPP. [...] If you have a date to make a rally, it's your place to defend. That is when young people are necessary in supporting parties, because youth are the most targeted people for all the parties, (Community Friendship Organisation Chair [Interview 41]).

This statement reflects the fact that many youth were aware of their indispensable manpower, yet they were also not blind to the manipulation of parties who used them to achieve their strategic objectives.

4.8 Narratives of exploitation

At the same time, many youth expressed a sense of exploitation by politicians, who they felt abandoned them as soon as their manpower was no longer needed, after elections. I had heard repeated the familiar refrain that politicians only ‘use, abuse and refuse us,’ which is also used among youth in Freetown, as documented by Christensen and Utas (2008, 532). As this young man waiting for used tires to repair observed:

[They] only use youth during campaigns. During politics. Now [we are] frustrated sitting here. During campaigning, people come, but now nobody come. [We are] disgruntled and hungry, things are getting expensive, (Car Park Workers [Interview 63]).

Narratives of exploitation were repeated by members of some youth groups. These tended to express a relative powerlessness vis-a-vis politicians, upon whom they relied for the realisation of promises. Although, under the circumstances, these narratives were more commonly directed towards SLPP, they were part of a wider theme of exploitation and abandonment by politicians after elections, from which APC was not exempt.¹⁸

They only use youth in politics. That is why you heard of so many youth groups. But after politics, give no time or attention to the youths. One of the key factors that kicked out SLPP. So even for now, you are just waiting til after the Local Council Election, if this other system of government will listen or care this time. Or by re-electing this new executive, if the new members will do the same thing, (Hill Station/Central Youth [Interview 73]).

1: We never know that before [political campaign groups]
2: It's the SLPP government that created all that. We never know that before in Kono District. So when APC come, say ‘let's form our own group’...But before first APC or NPRC we never know that ‘NPRC Youth’, ‘APC Youth’. No! For 10 years ‘SLPP Youth’....Create beaucoup misunderstanding among us. People take this like religion, (Central Youths/Balance Youth Chairman/No.11 [Interview 99]).

The cost of improving one's future prospects, as the above statement illustrates, went beyond potential, or even likely, abandonment after elections, but involved conflict with other youth. The aforementioned examples of intimidation and forced realignment of leadership illustrate the type of division that politics could bring about. “After politics,” however, I was

¹⁸ Although Kono has a long history of involving youth groups for political campaigning and violence, as explained in Chapter 3, many of these youth were not around to recall this earlier history, and only looked as far back as the military regime under NPRC.

told at several junctures, there was more connect than to divide these youth. The effect of elections in magnifying and creating division is one explored in detail by Christensen and Utas (2008). Although their study underlines factors that were specific to their target group (ex-combatants remobilised for the 2007 elections), such as pre-existing factional divisions, and a more deep-seated mistrust of politicians due to their post-war experiences of imprisonment, elections clearly reinforced these divisions and heightened their insecurity. While the costs of their relationship with parties were, to a large extent, masked by their enthusiasm for the VP, scratching below the surface revealed their doubts and fears, and that partnership in politics was, to a large extent, borne of necessity rather than conviction.

4.9 The elusive benefit from politics

The air around the local elections was expectant with promise. There was much anticipation that with their grievances now registered at the highest levels by the attack on No. 11, after the local elections there would be change. The prospect of employment was by far the most hoped for benefit, although electricity, running water, and the repairs to road to Matotoka (connecting them to Freetown) were close runners-up.

What now?

...VP said 'let us keep our fingers crossed, everything [will be] ok for us.' The sand belong to us. We have a procedure to work, which is going to be a peaceful procedure. Not only that sand is our development for Kono, there is so many development...After Local Council [elections] he's going to bring so many development for we the youth in Kono District, (Central Youth/No.11 [Interview 47]).

As this statement clearly shows, the message for the youth to abandon their violent tactics carried a lot of weight, coming from their brother the VP. He had instructed them to wait rather than to agitate, and had promised development, and not least, employment. Several informants had used the term *patienting* in referring to this period of waiting for future prospects to materialize, underscoring their lack of control:

[After] Local Council Elections, he [the VP] will know what to do. Let us patient. Until local election finish. 'I will know what to do for the sand.'...[Distribution of the sand is] one of the first programme on our agenda. Second, agriculture. Third, youth employment, (Central Youths/Balance Youth Chairman/No.11 [Interview 99]).

The aspirations for benefit of APC supporting youth ran high with youth anticipating that ‘jobs are on the way’. Many clung to the hope that the sand would be released to the youth, others saw ahead to jobs in welding, carpentry, agriculture, and even driving. December 2008 was mentioned as a possible time horizon, (Central Youths/No.11 [Interview 78]). Many youth groups prepared project proposals and letters requesting job recommendations for submission to the new local councilors and other local authorities after the elections. In one example, the Kono Bike Rider’s Union had not only written a project proposal for an agricultural project, but had also written letters to a number of key officials and politicians, including the VP, requesting the recommendation of their members, who did not earn a reliable income through bike riding, for employment with Koidu Holdings, (Annex 2). Similar requests had been made (or were being developed) by the street cleaning youth groups for jobs with the mining companies. It was already clear that most of these requests would not materialize, especially in a context where several of the companies had recently laid off staff. A number of groups also spoke of proposals for funding for agricultural projects. While several had received plots of land from the chiefdoms, it was less clear what their prospects would be for obtaining funding through what appeared to be mainly non-formalized channels, often linking in some way to the VP. The APC Youth League itself had apparently recently received 1000 acres of land and some bushels of rice and was now looking for funding. In addition, many of these groups had not written project proposals before, let alone held bank accounts, or any experience in managing the comparatively large project funds. Clearly the shift towards agriculture had originated from above, and with good reason. There simply wasn’t the absorptive capacity in the mining sector for the all of the youth who needed employment. Furthermore, it was an expensive contradiction for such a fertile country to import its rice while many of its people continued to go to sleep hungry. While many youth continued to hope for the release of No.11, they had also embraced the possibility of finding work in agriculture, and were now tactically navigating their way through shifting political priorities. Political patrons, therefore, provided not only a potential source of funds, recommendations, or even direct employment, but also the targets for which to aim. When the message came that agriculture, rather than mining, was the way of the future for Kono, youth groups embraced the opportunity to reinvent themselves (or revive old skills) as professional farmers.

The need for ‘recommendations’ was considered a normal and logical part of funding- and job-hunting. As the APC Youth League Chairman explained, his responsibility was to present various funding requests to the newly formed Local Council. It was logical that funding requests would be channeled through the APC representative, as SLPP had had its time when its supporters were favoured. However, this was not to say that groups had to actively support the APC to be eligible for recommendations:

You have youth groups all operating under APC Youth League. Some are non-political...[groups] come through me as youth leader and I present their case to the Council. And you need that recommendation from the District Youth League. Then I can pursue the matter, present to the Mayor...The majority of them [youth groups] were under SLPP and got funding from SLPP, and now SLPP gone. So how can they get this funding unless they go through [me]? So [they] have [to get] the recommendation of the Youth Leader to the District/City Council, (APC District Youth League Chairman/No.11 [Interview 98]).

Most groups seemed to know of few other alternatives for accessing funding. With little donor presence, and only one slow-running and expensive internet office in the city, it was unsurprising that most of the youth groups had no independent capacity to obtain funding, and avidly sought for advice on this.

However, the political message that jobs were on the way was clear from several conversations I’d had with APC leaders. In more than one case, it was suggested that youth groups represented a basic unit for dispersing work opportunities, as was explained by an aspirant APC Local Councilor:

I want to mobilize my youth for jobs when government comes in for youth employment. I want government to demand manpower.

What do you mean by mobilise?

Getting by youth groups because all this town is divided into youth groups. In my own strategy I’ve divided [this town] into youth groups. I work with the chairman of Konos Park, I get them all on the phone, “I want us to target x street today in ...” ...they will come out, (APC Candidate [Interview 46]).

The fact that recruitment was discussed in such candid terms by political party members reveals the degree to which such distribution arrangements were considered normal and expected - both among politicians and youth. Accessing this network was an object youth tried to achieve by belonging to groups, and by demonstrating their commitment to *the govern-*

ment of the day during the elections. But as much as there could be benefits attached to supporting the *government of the day*, the reverse was also true - being on the wrong side incurred a cost. Youth who supported SLPP were in the minority, and many kept their affiliation to themselves. The fear of being cut off from patronage networks had very real implications, as confessed by one SLPP supporting youth, after asking us to relocate to a more private place:

I am a strong SLPP supporter. So it makes it hard to submit proposals now. People know me as a strong SLPP supporter. Because my own party lost the election...All the seats for this Local Council Election won by APC - the area that I can ask for help. Now when I write a proposal to local government, those are now APC people so it is not easy to push my project forward, (Central Youth [Interview 93]).

In addition to no longer broadcasting his fixed political affiliation, this particular youth was also a member of the Central Youths – one of the groups which during the period of the general and local elections had been dominated, indeed taken over, by APC members. However, he had apparently chosen to remain a member, even after the previous SLPP chairman had been removed. For youths in this position, concealing one's political identity was as much a crucial part of navigating the changed political playing field, as was his membership of the organization that would increase his chances of getting funding. Marginalization due to politics was also experienced on an organizational level. The leader of “Bhagdad,” with his fixed SLPP leadership, explained how, with the turnover of power, his group had lost a source of patronage:

For the past government we were taking part in [street] cleaning exercises. But since SLPP out, they [APC youth groups] claim the organisation to be party supporter, so we stopped. ... Central Youths now with ruling party, cleaning on Saturdays. We did cleaning on Saturdays in days of SLPP. APC brought in their own youths. That always happens when there is a change, (Community Friendship Organisation Chairman [Interview 41]).

One of the main activities of these groups is monthly street cleaning exercises. Though not normally paid for their efforts, the municipality would sometimes loan them equipment, or small funds if possible. These groups would primarily make their money by slowing the traffic at ‘checkpoints,’ (Central Youths/Balance Youth/No.11 [Interview 99]). I learned of

one group that had split over the control of certain routes. Clearly there were benefits to be had from supporting the government of the day.

However, even among loyal supporters of the VP, promises were not always fulfilled. Many rumours circulated about the Central Youth leader who had been among the core group of No.11 leaders, and then at the forefront of the local election mobilisation. He had ceased to be the leader of the Central Youths while I was there, and had left to take a job at the water key in Freetown, allegedly in return for his loyal support. I had tried and failed to meet with him in Freetown, but later learned from Sia that he had returned to Koidu shortly afterwards, because there had been no job waiting for him in Freetown.

4.10 Summary and analysis

The attack on No.11 represented an attempt by youth to push out the limits of their agency and to effect change on an unfair system, rather than to remain affected by it. The policies, contracts and rules negotiated by others comprised a “social terrain” of obstacles that restricted their ability to navigate their survival. They viewed the post-war regime, the company, and a number of the chiefs as complicit actors operating in self-interest at the cost of their own rights to work and survive. In the past, some of the luckier ones had been able tactically to bend rules and access the sand, but with the sale of the tailings to Kariba, security was heightened and the property became off limits. The company, the chiefs, and their children continued to benefit while many struggled to find daily mining work as the rainy season approached. Now the new government, which had fueled their hope of social justice and a better future with its pledge to give them the sand, was threatening to repeat the familiar ritual of promise-breaking after elections.

Rather than continuing to wait indefinitely, youth leaders seized their pre-election leverage by rallying hundreds upon hundreds to claim their rights, and to pressure the party to honour its promise. This was no underhanded attempt to beat the system, but a bold demarcation of physical and discursive public space, which placed their pressing needs and realities at the centre of the table and commanded the attention, and the action, of those in power. They managed, briefly, to impose their will on the APC party leadership and the local traditional authorities, demonstrating a strategic agency that was anchored as much in their conviction, as it was in the compelling power of their numbers.

However, subsequent events dramatically changed their mode of engagement. After the arrest and subsequent release of a core group of the youth by a member of the ruling party, more than a dozen of them drove to Freetown to seek the forgiveness of the VP; such was their fear of burning bridges with Kono's highest positioned patron. This reversal was a dramatic admission of fault which, along with its highly apologetic discourse, spoke volumes of their weakened position. Returning to Koidu, many of these youth mobilized themselves for an APC victory that would bring to fruition the promise of the sand, among many others. In this context, discourse on *the government of the day* showed anything but political neutrality - it megaphoned a youth group's support for the APC party, and the VP specifically. The acts of 'campaigning', alignment of youth group leadership, intimidation and violence were tactics defined by the imperatives of electoral victory for party leaders.

But beneath the rhetoric about APC and the VP, many youth expressed feelings of exploitation by politicians, whom they felt used them during elections, luring them in with fake promises, only to abandon them afterwards. Many felt at the mercy of politicians, and their hopes for light, for employment, for better futures seemed to be riding entirely on the performance of *the government of the day*. While many expressed little faith in politicians in general, doubts and fears tended to be framed in terms of the past, often focusing on SLPP. They carefully avoided articulating pessimism about the future. But hope that APC would be different, and that jobs would come, was little more than a firmly clutched straw, of a reality over which they did not feel they had any power to influence now that elections were over. Few felt part of any wider community, let alone district or national, governance processes. When asked about their role in decision-making and agenda-setting, with some exceptions, they tended to elaborate on their physical contributions to development, through street cleaning and sensitization. Almost all expressed frustration at being ignored by government outside of election time and being disconnected from official youth leaders.

These youth share imaginaries of personal socio-economic emancipation: of jobs that can provide them a decent living and self-sufficiency. These continue to be beyond reach. The promise of jobs remains distant, and a lack of options means that most look to politicians to bring about these changes. Many have joined youth groups, partly for the security net of peer assistance, but also to maximise their chances for job recommendations and funding. The "political youth" groups I took an interest in were uncritical of the source -

whether from politicians or donors. But their limited capacities for seeking out and obtaining, let alone managing such funds (e.g. from the Youth Basket Fund) makes this prospect unrealistic for most. Many continue to hope that the government will intervene with the company to “release” the No.11 sand, and that Koidu Holdings will expand its operations. In the meantime, while they wait for these prospects, they continue to do what they must for grim survival. During elections at least, this means placing the goals of patrons ahead of their own, in the hope that theirs come true in the longer term. In this respect, many of these youth are shrewd navigators of the political terrain, but their ability to affect the structure of the public domain is highly limited.

This case reveals how youth perceive their engagement in the public arena in terms of physically active contributions, and that, furthermore, their normal modes of participation are governed by political imperatives that are not of their own making. The predominant tactical agency is exemplified by discourse on *the government of the day*, which is taken to be a shorthand for the opportunistic way in which marginalised youth engage in politics, with a view to maximizing short term gains and long term prospects, and to preserving relations with those in power who have access to resources. In the absence of formal processes for influencing decisions and processes, youth resort to subversive activity, as exemplified by No.11. However, the possibility that youth were able to momentarily influence decision makers through their illegal action was not due to their strategic agency alone. The action was, crucially, enabled by configurations of power that heightened their own power over patrons.

In summary, this case reveals how the lack of alternatives that characterises the situation of marginalised youth means that their predominant form of agency in the public domain continues to be determined by patrimonial concerns, and is therefore tactical. This, in turn, limits their capacity to widen or deepen their participation in societal decision-making, because effecting such a reform would involve challenging existing power relations, and challenging those upon whom they depend.

5. Conclusion

5.1 *The limits of youth agency*

Optimism about the growing moral independence among youth in post-war Sierra Leone is well placed. The normalization of acts and behaviours that challenge social norms of deference to elders and reciprocity, such as the widespread practice of political shapeshifting, reflect how youth culture is diverging from established notions of democracy and citizenship that have not benefited them. Such changing values underpin demands for social justice and accountability of political leaders that are key to consolidating democracy.

On the surface, the practice of *watermelon politics* and the support for *the government of the day* may appear different; the first involving mercurial shape shifting between contending parties, and the latter implying commitment to the party in power. But in fact, both behaviours are expressions of tactical agency, driven by short term, pragmatic calculations of interests in which ideology and loyalty play little part. The use of this language shows an advanced way of conceptualizing their interests and legitimizing their actions which in itself is positive, and which may be eroding traditional forms of patrimonialism.

But to regard this as evidence that patrimonialism is on the way out is misplaced. *Watermelon politics* and *the government of the day* are merely new forms of patrimonialism, in which clients are less loyal, but no less dependent upon patrons for advancement. In other words, the evidence that youth are breaking with tradition to claim their entitlements should not be equated with their enhanced agency in the public sphere, in the strategic sense. Patrimonialism continues to shape the terrain of politics and employment, and to frame, and constrain, the modes of engagement of marginalized youth in particular. It continues to limit their wider participation in politics, and their role to that of implementors rather than decision-makers. Any power or influence they exert ceases to pack any punch after elections, after which point they can scarcely even hold politicians accountable for their promises.

Islands of strategic agency, such as the attack on No.11, and the *watermelon 'tricks'* of ex-combatants are enabled by political configurations of power which temporarily enhance the leverage of youth. Others, such as the entrepreneurialism and independence of associations, are also undermined by the imperative to support, and to seek the support of *the government of the day*.

In other words, the predominant form of agency of youth in the public space, is tactical. Rather than leading positive change, for instance by joining forces for more responsive and accountable political alternatives, youth are too often compelled by poverty and lack of alternatives to prop up, and indeed to replicate through their actions and expectations, that systems marginalize them. The u-turn on No.11, and the discourse of *government of the day* illustrates this contradiction.

5.2 Patrimonialism as a stabilizing system?

A central paradox in this study has been the desire of youth for material independence, set against the unavoidable need for favourable positioning within patronage networks as a means of achieving this. They face an acute lack of options, and to the extent that they continue to look to patrons for the realisation of their objectives, they remain tied to the interests of more powerful individuals. This system may be beneficial in a situation where the ends and means of patrons are relatively benign, and provided that they can fulfill their promises. However, recalling the quotation by McEvoy (2006) in the introduction, the fulfillment or not of these promises has a wider significance, including as formative experiences in the post-war socialization of youth. Continued frustration and lack of options for improvement could, in time, change the cost-benefit equation in favour of remobilisation in the service of patrons with far less benign objectives. Beyond pragmatism, the youth from this study expressed hope for “self-reliance” which would free them from their reluctant dependence on politics, and which would enable them to become the socially fulfilled individuals.

The attack on No.11 should also be taken as a warning of the limits of patience, and the ability of youth to endure indefinite economic and social waithood while they wait for others to take action. Outside of elections, formal processes for participating in decision-making and accessing funds remain inaccessible to most underemployed, undereducated

and patrimonially disconnected youth. In the absence of more effective mechanisms, the resources of marginalized youth can be mobilised with greater impact through informal strategies that shift the locus of power in their favour. In the words of one youth, they know that they need to “make a big noise” in order for their voices to be heard, (Gunpoint Youth Chairman/No.11 [Interview 97]). Violence was not a goal for most youth involved in the No.11 attack, though it was clearly a combustible situation. Although the youth backed down, their support for the *government of the day* was no oath of allegiance. The cost of further defiance outweighed the potential benefits in 23-27 April 2008, but this equation may change, if in time, nothing else does.

5.3 Implications

The finding that patrimonialism continues to shape and limit the political engagement and to define the expectations of marginalised youth has implications for programming in the area of youth empowerment. This research reinforces the need for youth programming that differentiates between context-specific categories of youth, and roots itself in the realities of marginalized youth. The alternative risks further entrenching power relations and further alienating the marginalized, by favouring those youth who more articulate, more socially engaged and formally organized. For governance, this means going beyond mere consultation of youth, and making the space for their strategic agency in shaping and evaluating processes and decisions, (UNDP 2006). To end with, the most compelling questions raised by this research are:

- Are there examples of sustained strategic agency by marginalized youth?
- How does patrimonialism manifest itself during the periods between elections?
- How do youth imagine independence?
- How has patrimonialism adapted to the increasingly urbanized and group-oriented realities of youth existence in the post-war context?
- How can governments and development agencies mitigate the risk that their programmes inadvertently reinforce patrimonialism and the dependent position of youth?
- How can marginalized youth be given a meaningful role in decision making?

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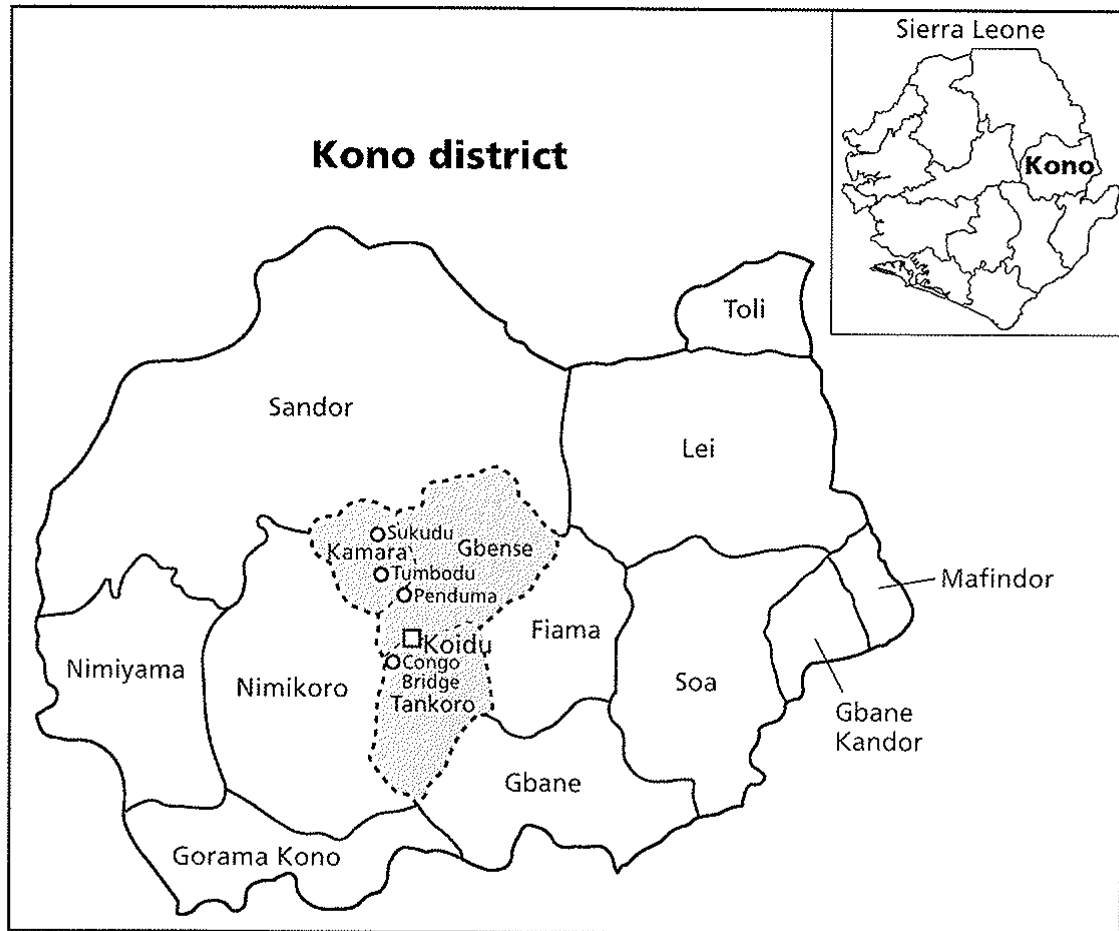
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Annex 1. Maps



Figure 3.1 Map of Kono district with chiefdoms. Circles indicates field sites¹³



¹³ Where differences exist in the spellings of place names, we have used the spellings of The Road Map of Sierra Leone and Freetown, produced by Oxford Cartographers.

(From Bøås and Hatløy 2006, 26)

Annex 2. Request for recommendation

THE KONO BIKE RIDERS UNION (K.B.R.U.)

The Ministry of
Youths and Sport,
Freetown.

C/o Konomanyi Lorry Park,
Koidu Town-Kono District,
14th July, 2008.

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR EMPLOYMENT
FACILITIES

The above named Youth Group is kindly asking that you recommend them to Koidu Holdings Mining Company for employment facilities. According to reliable source, the Koidu Holdings Mining Company will soon resume work.

For your acknowledgement Sir, we have a total number of 1,700 jobless Youths in our Union. A good number of these Youths have no Bikes on their own but few. For the rest of the jobless Youths to have source of income to sustain themselves, only through employment.

It is therefore based on this fact that we solicit your good recommendation to the Koidu Holdings Mining Company for employment facilities in the near future as a Father of the Nation.

We are with you and shall always remain to be with you Sir.



Approved:.....
Tamba Peussima
CHAIRMAN
077 871670

Dominic Tamba Lebbie,
SECRETARY GENERAL
077 832244

As this letter indicates, the income from bike riding is unreliable and insufficient to meet the cost of living. Many riders do not earn enough in a day to pay for the cost of bike rental. The Bike Rider's Association, acts to protect and promote their interests, whether advocating for improved roads or licensing systems, fighting police harassment or assisting riders who get injured. In addition, as this letter exemplifies, the leader also looks out for the wider interests of the members. Copies of this letter were also written to the Chairman of the District Youth Coalition, the APC Party Chairman for Kono District, the Paramount Chief for Tankoro, the Council of Paramount Chiefs for Kono, the Mines Minister, the Minister of Youth and Sports, and the Vice President.

Annex 3. Pictures



Top and middle, the No.11 sand dump. On 23rd April 2008 hundreds of youth trespassed and began removing the sand. The tree at the top of the dune marks the area where they erected a red flag.

Below, members of a youth group outside of their meeting place, most of whom participated in the “attack”.



Annex 4. Contact Chart

Name/description	Topic	Date & Place	Accessed	Notes
1. Visiting Professor at Fourah Bay College	07 Elections	20.06 Spain (Phone)	Morten Bøås	Link youth participation to failure of peace dividend; SLPP vs. APC youth wings; FBC incident/mirroring and predicting national politics
2. SLPP supporters, university students	Their political involvement	21.06, 23.06 Freetown	Kendra Dupuis Oslo researcher	Politicization of student politics by ruling party; politics and influence are necessary for survival
3. SLPP Radio Manager	Candidates radio program	21.06 Freetown SLPP HQ	Brima Samai Freetown guide	Radio station programming – profiling candidates. Audience not just SLPP
4. college drop-out studying IT	APC protest vote, himself	22.06 Freetown (Congo Cross area)	Met in street	Showed me directions and walked around Ftn together. Not politically active. Politicians are liars. Voted APC in protest against SLPP and now there is light. Dropped out of college bc no money. Both parents died, lives with support of uncle.
5. World Bank researchers	Youth and mining companies	23.06 Freetown (Africanus House, Howe St.)	Morten Bøås	Remobilization of ex-combatants; positioning of researcher; division within mining communities
6. PMDC youth spokesperson, running for leadership of youth wing	Youth wing and influence	Freetown PMDC HQ	General enquiry	PMDC a young man's party, less hierarchical; believes strongly in need to challenge elders
7. SLPP Youth Wing leader	SLPP youth wing	24.06 SLPP HQ	SLPP Radio Manager	Participation of young generation; very hierarchical from his description, but he does not say this. APC sacking of SLPP HQ. Youth politics in the 90s.
8. UNDP Youth Program Officer	Youth empowerment programmes	24.06 UNDP Peace and Dev HQ	Work contact	Why UNDP got into youth programmes; National youth councils and new commission; politicization of youth organizations; politics in Kono, renegade DYC
9. APC Candidate, Ward 391	Local Council youth candidate	24.06 Downtown Freetown	college drop-out studying IT	Uses of influence; his populist style (e.g. all the things he has done for the community and individuals); youth mobilized to help him get the APC symbol
10. Leader of National Youth Coalition and of District Youth Council, Western Area	Politicization of NUSS	25.06 Freetown, Jay's Guest-house	UNDP Youth Program Officer	National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) is not politicized in his opinion, the student union elections were free and fair; structure and role of NY Coalition/Council
11. UNIOSIL Security Advisors	Kono security	25.06 UNIOSIL HQ	Work contact	Security situation in Kono how far will they go to display political affiliation?

12. Director of Operations & 2 young trainees National Electoral Commission	Local Elections	26.06 NEC, Free-town	Position	Challenges of youth in running in elections, lack of funds; LC position not paid; voting behaviour of older people & fear of youth; youth not united or well organized; Kono the only district that will sway elections
13. UNDP Adviser National Electoral Commission	Intimidation in elections	26.06 NEC, Ftn	NEC Director of Ops	A disproportionate number of those who withdrew their candidacy from local elections were from Kono, and gave health reasons. Youth mostly associated with violence.
14. District Elections Officer, Kono National Electoral Commission	Intimidation in local elections	27.06 Drive up to Kono	NEC Director of Ops	Police fear of being transferred, so must share same ideology as ruling party. 95% youth in Kono are ex-combatants.
15. Researcher	Local elections	28.06 Uncle Ben's Guesthouse Koidu	World Bank researcher	Politicization of chiefs; Kono swing state with higher stakes; greater resistance where communities are party strongholds
16. APC District Youth Chairman	APC youth support	29.06 Uncle Ben's Guesthouse Koidu	Sia/position	Promise jobs to APC youth organizations – saying APC organisations get priority (and this is right)
17. Sia Foryoh	Herself	29.06 Uncle Ben's Guesthouse Koidu	UNDP contact	Personal story; women in politics; youth rights and increased awareness; need for political connections; recognition as a strategy to get out
18. APC member beaten by SLPP	attack	29.06 His house, Koidu	Sia, knew from journalist investigation	Brief chat with Sia translating, mainly described the incident.
19. Female Independent Candidate, Niminkoro	Intimidation, women in politics	29.06 Kainkordu Rd.	Sia	Intimidation because not APC and bc a woman; financial challenge due to being a woman and independent
20. SLPP Constituency Chairman	SLPP in local elections	30.06 His house, Koidu	Sia/position	MOCKY; jobs; political intimidation bad; police cowed
21. District Youth Council leader	District Youth Council	30.06 His swank apartment, Koidu	Sia/position	DYC no funding from gov; low capacity of Ministry Y&S so they didn't organize elections and DYC went ahead with donor funding.
22. Secretary, Advocates for Vulnerable Aid	Women's rights, activism	30.06 Trader's Union atayah hang out	Youth hang out for discussing politics	Advocacy for street girls; DYC has done nothing for the youth; no information on Youth Basket Fund (UNDP); frustration with donors
23. Bike rider	Central Youths	01.07 Bike	random	Central Youth are political and get paid by political parties. When asked which, he said both. He is versatile.
24. Chairperson Affected Mining Land Owners & Affected Property Owners Association PRO: DYC	DYC	02.07 His house, Koidu	World Bank researchers	DYC controversy; National Youth Coalition Leader, and District Youth Council leaders not good representatives; DYC has done nothing, no funding; Must be part of the system to change it; used to oppose youth involvement in politics, now supports. Boastful about his accomplishments: claims organized KH demo.

25. Girls in Peace March	Girls in political violence	02.07 Community Centre Koidu	Peace rally event	Girls are involved in political violence too; leader of Central Youth who spoke at the Peace Rally known for brutality, cut ears off and starved people, has now cut his hair. They clean the streets now.
26. Woman fabric business owner	Women in business; political violence	02.07 Her shop, market off of Kainkordu	Random – woman shopowner	Political violence made them close shops early (e.g. No. 11); will vote, but not campaign; not a member of any groups; problem is diamonds and forgetting about education
27. Young Candidate SLPP, Ward 64, Community Friendship Org/ Bhagdad member	SLPP campaigning challenges	02.07 Opera	Position/age	Political intimidation; finance, age barriers; youth have no influence after elections, same is true within the party; broken promises; DYC not effective. Cooption of Bike Rider's Executive leader, KBRU mostly APC supporters.
28. Young SLPP candidate Ward 74	Campaigning challenges	02.07 Opera	Position/age	Motive – non indigenous leaders neglect development, he is a son of the soil. Youth by age, not by ability to provide. (He is a teacher, provides for friends, but still a youth). If he wins would declare APC support.
29. Former CSO youth activist	Youth definition	02.07 Opera	Sia acquaintance	Youth age is high bc of the war; violence bc of low education, politicians use youth. Youth have no capacity to represent themselves – need money for politics.
30. Chairman, Central Youths/ One of No.11 leaders (notorious)	Central Youths	03.07 Opera	Position/ reputation	Appointed chairman by elders and youth; a non-political group, support government of the day; APC brings development; no tension with chiefs or police; priority is agriculture
31. Vice-chair CY and the Central Youths	Central Youths	04.07 Central Youths, 7 Dabunder Street	Chairman, Central Youths	They are with the government of the day; all views are allowed (despite APC posters and t-shirts everywhere); farm to feed themselves; trying to acquire land from chiefdom; only youth leader they know is Adamu; get money through street cleaning; no capacity for proposals
32. Burnt House leader (Community meeting place for all ages)	Youth definition	03.07 Burnt House, behind market off Old Yengema	Called me over in passing	Over 51 and claims to be a youth leader/advisor; old man in the group says he is a youth bc he lives among the youth, but others around him laugh and say he is not
33. CTN Radio Journalist	Corruption in journalism	04.07 Opera	Sia, not planned	Young people don't have a voice where elders are present; buying stories vs. objectivity in reporting
34. Street girl	Her problems	04.07 Opera	Sia	Came from Bo to sell palm oil, hard to make a living so prostitution - shame; not a member of any orgs because they are quarrelsome and she hates violence; those who front projects eat the money.
35. Young construction shop worker	How he got his job	05.07 Lebanese construction shop	position	He's been working there 3 years now, and is fit; got the job when the boss asked for his help and he was always available and willing; why some find it hard to find work? Bad boys. Non No.11 participant.

36. Uncle Ben's young "nephew"	Himself, CY Leader	05.07 Uncle Ben's, 5-5	Through guesthouse	Uncle ben is his Father's best friend and funds his education, and he does house chores in exchange; wants to be a musician or a journalist; took me to see Sam Sumana's House; CY Leader was in jail for stabbing someone over a diamond profit dispute; APC youth said SLPP will not have a campaign in Koidu, if not will be danger in the town bc in presidential elections did not give APC chance to meet in TNA Barry.
37. SLPP candidate who withdrew from race	Local Council Youth Committee	04.05 His house, Sinatown	NEC list/ Sia acquaintance	Claims he was never intimidated, but had funding problems; uneasy talking on his porch; Youth and Sport Committee, only 1 project funded in 3 years, on leadership training; most time of the 1 st term as Local Councillor was spent in training.
38. Secretary Network Movement for Justice and development (NMJD)	Mining, sands, himself	04.05 Dinner at Airies	Sia	Cost of education – no higher education in Kono; story about the sands (sand sold before APC made the promise); NMJD gives voice to affected communities; he has a good job because he found a diamond and used the money for his education.
39. Guest at Uncle Ben's	Change – youth influence	07.07 Uncle Ben's at breakfast	Via guest-house	Youth are more active now than before, their turn; change due to increased awareness and travel; e.g. mayoral candidate for SLPP, a younger person.
40. Trader from Free-town	APC campaigning	07.07 Opera	Random, guest at VIP	Promises of chiefs for help; no money but said can go to him (APC big man); orphan, illiterate, has job buying and selling scrap metal with his older "brother"
41. Leader of Community Friendship Organisation (Baghdad)	How politics use youth, Kariba	07.07 Opera	Position/ reputation	Campaigning and defending activities of CFO; most active groups are political; non-violence; he founded CFP; cleaning exercises change with ruling party (used to be Baghdad, now CY); claims Kariba youth deal sparked no. 11 (privileged youth seeking compensation)
42. Chairman Gunpoint Youths (whole group)	Funding activities; non-political	08.07 Gunpoint Youth HQ – acrid smelling burned out house	APC District Youth Chair	Cleaning, agriculture, holding shows, and self-taxation; they are non-political; plan for project proposal "youth watch" to hold politicians accountable for promises
43. Female student	Campaigning, generational conflict	08.07 Gunpoint junction	Random, waiting	Student and her sis does not love school. GY does campaigning, rallies, dancing. Youth don't have a voice around elders. Assertive about this, classroom experience.
44. Chairlady Balance Youths, 28	Activities, campaigning	08.07 Mother's Help Restaurant	APC District Youth Chair/ Position	Street cleaning, voluntary contributions; support government of the day, has the power; rallies – 3 for LCE, women do cooking.
45. Coach & Voluntary officer for Sports Ministry Youth and Sports	Accessing funds, youth policy	09.07 Community Centre	Ministry/ Position	Youth policy is not legal; no budget; YES programme dead; no list of groups or criteria for what is a youth group are available; political groups
46. APC Local Councillor Aspirant, former Vice Chair of Kono Bike Rider's Assoc.	KBRU, No. 11	09.07 Opera/VIP	SLPP Candidate/ Bhagdad member	Politicians target groups (e.g. BRA); was with PMDC before joining APC; VP; Job strategy to mobilize youth groups; Kariba conflict with Assinatu – youth opposed the chiefs and supported Kariba

47. Central Youth/ No.11 participant (notorious)	No. 11, campaigning	09.07 Opera/VIP	Reputation	Plan to attack sands and kidnap authorities; sacrifice of Kono youth; VP “procedure” and patienting; was the one to fire the gun and run the flag up the hill at No.11
48. Bhagdad Chairman (part 3)	Membership watermelon	09.07 Opera/VIP	Met already 2x	Most active groups must be political; disgruntled dangerous youths; SLPP supporter always; connections needed for jobs; 15 June rally; intimidation
49. Paramount Chief, Chairman of Council of Paramount Chiefs of Kono	Change in youth	10.07 His house in 5-5	CTN journalist, position	Less diamonds now, jobs harder to come by, youth grew up with adult responsibilities; there is less hostility now; society has changed, more accepting of youth participation; low education a huge promise; chiefs and government of the day
50. Kono Union Chair	No. 11	10.07 Opera/VIP	APC Councillor	TKB also present and appeared to be coaching him; origins of tailings; afraid to talk; youth against the company
51. Ministry of Social Welfare	Registered youth groups	11.07 Ministry Office	Ministry	Criteria for recognizing community organisations – non-political a major criteria
52. Tankoro Youth Organization Chairman	Agricultural reclamation	11.07 Congo Bridge Swamp	Position as youth leader Tankoro	No funding; in kind support; agriculture as an alternative to mining; education and training of leadership;
53. SLPP Youth candidate Community Friendship Org (Bhagdad) member	No.11, intimidation	11.07 Opera/VIP	2 nd interview	Worked for Kariba, one of the original 10, never paid; did not demo, does not believe in taking law into own hands; District Council Chairperson aspirant ordered release of arrested youths; intimidation and apology by tormentor after elections
54. Concord Times journalist Kono correspondent	No.11 and other youth demonstrations, police	12.07 Motema police station	Found his articles on youth unrest in Africa Online in Oslo	Youth AOC promises are only alleged; protests oversalaries are cause of some unrest; chiefs inciting youths; politicizing youth through leadership (he seems very establishment for a young journalist!!)
55. NMJD Secretary	No.11, land acquisition, NMJD	13.07 Mother’s Help Restaurant	2 nd interview	NMJD programmes; support to DYCoalition-Council is government owned and would be politicized; registered youth groups
56. Honourable Deputy Minister Internal Affairs, Local Gov and Rural Dev	Mining, fighting corruption	13.07 Uncle Ben’s	Guest at Uncle Ben’s	Vast mineral findings will drive SL’s economic regeneration; rooting out corruption through clear contracts
57. Gbense Chiefdom Speaker	Youth don’t listen, sand ownership company - community agreement	15.07 His compound	Position (Gbense is No.11 chiefdom)	
58. Site supervisor and 4 workers, including one who is the Gbense Youth Leader Kariba, No. 11 Site	No. 11 events; how workers got jobs	15.07 No. 11 site	Location/ company	
59. Manager Kariba	Corruption of chiefs, VP, No. 11	16.07 Kariba HQ	position	
60. Former Kariba worker and Central Youths Chair, No.11 participant	No.11, Central Youths	16.07 His house	SLPP Candidate/ Bhagdad member	alignment of youth leadership with elections; youth-company-chiefs conflict

61. Konos Park Youth Chairman	Alignment of youth party leadership	17.07 His house	Former Central Youth Chair	Supporting VP; group wants him out bc say he's SLPP; not involved in No.11
62. VP/acting Chair, Central Youths	Alignment; agriculture; survival	17.07 Opera	Position	A miner, struggle for survival; former CY Chair not active; did not go to No.11 because was working; plans for agriculture
63. Youth repairing tires in car park	Survival; exclusion; education; No. 11	18.07 Car park	Activity	Watermelon in 2007; did not participate in No.11
64. Support Officer Tankoro Police Station	No.11, election violence	18.07 Tankoro Police Station	Office	Rampant mining after 2007 election; arrests after No.11; Berewa violence incident
65. No.9 Youth Farmers Chairman	Their activities, campaigning	18.07 Opera	Former Central Youths Chair	Politicians come campaign the group, each party, but many affiliations within the group
66. Barmat II Youth Organisation	Survival	18.07 Opera		Teaching livelihood; not in No.11
67. Tankoro Youth Organization (TACYDA) Chairman & VP	Funding; Agricultural reclamation	19.07 Congo Bridge Swamp	Second interview	Pressuring gov to continue funding; workers cultivate land on daily stipend; group not approached by campaigners; ex-combatants fear to tell; inadequate involvement of youth in dev planning; political youths
68. TACYDA member and worker at re-claimed swamp	Education, how joined TACYDA	19.07 Congo Bridge Swamp	TACYDA Chair	SLPP supporter, not public supporter; doesn't know about Central Youths; relatively high ed (WASCE exam)
69. Chairman, Kono Bike Rider's Union (KBRU)	Jobs, survival, agriculture; biker's advocacy issues	20.07 KBRU in central car park	position	Political parties hire bikes out for campaigning (not shady, they do for all parties and riders forbidden to wear party t-shirts); most riders are ex-combatants; want gov support in getting jobs at Koidu Holdings and to develop land – agricultural plot
70. Cook, in charge at Uncle Ben's House	CY Leader	20.07 Uncle Ben's	Guesthouse	CY Leader lived with the VP in his compound for some 6 months and was his closest body-guard. VP was a miner.
71. KBRU Executive member	campaigning for APC	20.07 KBRU	Location/ occupation	APC supporter, but no politics at work; "this office, most do a lot of thing for APC"
72. KBRU rider	Survival; campaigning and money	20.07 KBRU	Location/ occupation	In Local council Election only APC came, vote for VP; gave money to exec, who ate the money (fee for bikes?); SLPP supporter, but afraid to say aloud, but no threats to vote APC
73. Two Central Youth, and Hill Station Youth members No.11 participants	Community youth groups; alignment; NPRC	20.07 Central Youths	Location (CY)	Alignment after elections; Central Youths originally to help with local defense; military gov better
74. Balance Youth, No.11 participant	GOD; cleaning; no.11	21.07 Opera	Location (CY)	Government of day; no.11 plan – a security
75. Alleged Chairman for youths in Tankoro	Youth definition	21.07 Central Youths	Location (CY)	Not sure his position is official, no one else has mentioned him; being a youth means active behaviour – not about age
76. Central Youths member	NPRC days	21.07 Central Youths	Location (CY)	Rolling and selling joints; carpenter by training but no work. Miner, wants gov to recommend CY to Koidu Holdings
77. Central Youth Vice-Chairman Diamond Stars player, No.11 participant	No.11, VP promise	21.07 Central Youths	Location (CY)	No.11 and arrests; didn't hear promise; about survival; occasional mining when off season.

78. Central Youths large group, No.11 participants	Survival; education	21.07 Central Youths	Location (CY)	Large group of youths, all males, who came to smoke weed. Must be regular thing as they all seemed to appear just as one finished rolling the joints. Most are miners. “statehouse”; CY rules; low ed; No.11
79. Number Nine Youth Farmers Member	Survival	21.07 Number 9 Youths HQ	Membership	No schooling, No.9 helps them to find survival through hairdressing and raising pigs;
80. Number 9 Youth Farmers Member	Programmes influenced by authorities; youth leaders	21.07 Number 9 Youths HQ	Membership	O level certificate, used to be in training to be a priest but can't make a living, needed to support parents; take turns helping to develop each other's personal swamps and profit sharing; capacity development
81. Number 9 Youth Farmers Member	survival	21.07 Number 9 Youths HQ	Membership	Form 2 ed; fitter (engineer/mechanic); survival through organization; no time for politics
82. Number 9 Chairman	Participation in development plan (none)	21.07 Number 9 Youths HQ	Membership	Chain of command for accessing info
83. Magistrate Court Kono District	No.11 arrests	22.07 Courthouse	position	Bail of arrested youths (discharged, not acquitted); Senior citizens must stand assurity bc of nature of the crime, but can not reveal name
84. Deputy Chief Administrator for Koidu New Sebehum City Council (KNSCC)	streetcleaning	22.07 City Council	position	Provide tools for youth who want to help with street cleaning (lend); City development plan – all society invited to participate; no map of Koidu
85. District Project Officer; Youth Coordinator GTZ	Agricultural/rural repatriation programme	22.07 GTZ office	Interest in agriculture programme, discussed on radio	Many youths were interested in returning to rural areas (in a survey) if they could be guaranteed they could support themselves
86. Community Friendship Org/ “Bhagdad” Chairman	alignment	22.07 Opera	4 th meeting	Organization tried to remove him for his SLPP support, but did not succeed. 30-35% membership APC supporters.
87. Secretary Central Youths, No.11 participant	His story	22.07 Opera	2 nd meeting	From Kono, miner; time in the army during the war; Central Youth early days, cleaning and securing the town;
88. Young Women in Need of Development Chairlady	Their activities; decision making in the community; DYC	23.07 Her house, Old Yengema	Sia	Girls off the street project; supporting Tankoro Chief with decision about the road repair; District youth council elections without Ministry support
89. Former Chairman KBRU	Campaign benefits	23.07 Car park	Lansana	What politics contributed to KBRU during 07 elections; capacity development
90. KBRU Exec member	Internal KBRU election; alignment	23.07 Car park	Location (KBRU)	KBRU Leader an APC supporter, but that's not why he won
91. Paramount Chief Tankoro Chiefdom	Decision making; land reclamation	24.07	Position	Part of the problem with the entire mineral sector – communities, not just youth, not involved in decisions; promises for jobs; recommendations; No.11; exploitative civil society
92. Gunpoint Youth Treasury Clerk	Recs for jobs	24.07 Gunpoint junction	Location (Gunpoint)	Recommendations for jobs; offers me money to help him leave Salone

93. Central Youth Member	CY alignment; SLPP	24.07 Traders' Union	Location (CY)	Marginalisation of SLPP supporters; alignment
94. Bike Rider	Youth groups	25.07	Ride home	Membership in youth groups for sociality, not campaign groups
95. Ministry of Agriculture Kono Director	Support to agriculture groups	25.07 Ministry of Agriculture	Position/Ministry	How support youth groups in agriculture; new groups coming up bc political will, many their first time in agriculture
96. Operations Director for Mineral Commodities and Rock Diamonds (Kariba Kono Ltd.)	Youth unemployment; corruption; G.O.D.	25.07 Kariba Kono Ltd.	Position	Chiefs and corruption and link to youth unemployment; large scale agriculture plan, philanthropic financiers; government of the day; VP, No.11 and Chief discussion
97. Gunpoint Youth Chairman, No.11 participant	No.11, illegal mining; NPRC; street cleaning;	26.07 Gunpoint junction	Activity (during street cleaning)	Ward committees useless; plans to hold a meeting to unite the youth groups; fourth former ed; anger towards SLPP who provoked No.11, who sold the land; youth mined sansan before SLPP
98. Gunpoint Youth, No.11 observer	No.11;	26.07 Gunpoint junction	Gunpoint Chair	Stranded musician from Freetown, witnessed No.11, sparked by SLPP provocative statement
99. Balance Youths Chairman; and Central Youth members, No.11 participants	No.11 apology Survival SLPP exploitation	27.07 Opera	Central Youth member/No.11 participant	Balance and Central Youth relations – power struggle downplayed; mining mainly bc no support for agriculture; street cleaning divide areas; NPRC days open mining; shame of not being able to buy a drink; anger towards SLPP “sabotaging VP who we want to be our father”
100. District Youth Chairman APC	Recs., Agriculture plans, No.11	27.07 Mother's Help Restaurant	2 nd meeting	Need recommendation of the Youth Leader to the District/City Council; doesn't want to discuss No.11
101. District Youth Officer Ministry Youth and Sports Koidu	NPRC; youth policy; DYC	26.07 Community, Kono	Position	SLPP youth programmes; NPRC reviving youth policy; local council youth committees; low capacity of youth in writing projects and approaching donors
102. Ministry Youth and Sports, Freetown	NPRC youth policy	30.07 Community centre, Ftn	Ministry Representative Kono	NPRC youth policy; new Youth Commission – independent and taking on all youth issues
103. APC Candidate Supporter who led youth roadblock	APC Candidate and roadblock	30.07.08 Aberdeen Road, Ftn	College drop-out	Youth roadblock to support APC Candidate

Follow-up interviews on No.11 by Sia, February 2009

104. Group Leader for No.11	No.11	11.02.09 Koidu City	Sia	Youth aware of illegality of No.11. Update on No.11 and visit of President.
105. Gunpoint Youths	No.11	11.02.09 Koidu City	Already interviewed	Youth aware of illegality of No.11. Update on No.11 and visit of President.
106. APC Councillor	No.11	11.02.09 Koidu City	Already interviewed	No.11 apology to VP
107. No.11 participant	No.11	12.02.09 No.11 Village	Sia	No.11, description
108. Kariba Accountant	No.11	13.02.09 Koidu	Already interviewed	Company relationship with youth
109. Councillor and Deputy Mayor	No.11	13.02.09 Koidu	Sia	No.11 update on gov response Delegation to VP
110. Gun Point Youth chairman	No.11	13.02.09 Koidu	Already interviewed	No.11 attack description
111. Sia's Observations	No.11	14.02.09 Koidu		Future outlook